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This is the 100th issue of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" — the 100th different copy that we have edited since the inception of EQMM a little more than ten years ago. Naturally, the publication of Volume 19, Number 100, gives us an enormous thrill, and we know you will pardon us if we tend to look upon this issue as something of a landmark, something of a milestone in mystery and murder . . .

By way of oblique celebration, we have decided arbitrarily to include in this 100th issue of EQMM the 10000th story we purchased since EQMM came into being. The 10000th story turns out to be "Loveday's Secret," by L. J. Beeston; and even if we had tried, we couldn't have picked a more representative tale. For this story offers many of the 'tec qualities we have tried so hard to find for you in the past ten years — sparkling ingenuity, a literate style, credible characterizations, twist-and-turn suspense, and a plot so well constructed that it has meat on its bones, blood in its veins, and even a climactic whiplash at the end . . .

LOVEDAY'S SECRET

by L. J. BEESTON

LOVEDAY'S NERVOUSNESS, WHICH had been very apparent during dinner, found audible expression when he had brought his three friends into his little private den away from the dining room.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have asked you here this evening with a special object; I might say — a most unusual object. I have had something on my mind for a long time. I want to tell you what it is, and I want your advice in a matter which is one of the most difficult that you could possibly imagine."

"Good iron, Loveday," said Forbes, flippantly. "A problem spiked all over with perplexities. I am your man, for one. Fire away whenever you're ready."

"But is an excellent dinner the best introduction?" queried Trant.

The third guest, Denvil, stretched out his long legs comfortably. "Drone away, Loveday," he encouraged. "Get it all off your chest."

The last speaker had the armchair left of the fire, and Trant had the chair right of the fire. Forbes leaned against the mantelpiece, smoking a cigarette in the longest tube in London.

"I am glad you take it easily," answered Loveday. His nervousness had gone, but it was replaced by anxiety. He drew up a chair at some little distance from his friends, and leaned forward in it, hands clasped, looking at his carpet. He was a bachelor of middle age, with scanty reddish hair

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carefully brushed, pale eyelashes, a girlish voice, a too-kind heart, and had never had an enemy — nor would have.

"The trouble came to me nearly a year ago," he continued, in a subdued tone. "I will confess that it has made me exceedingly unhappy. I do not know if you, or my other friends, have noticed a change in me, but I feel a great change in myself. By a mere accident I came into possession of a secret which I believe I am wholly unfitted to keep. It has become such a burden that I made up my mind to impart it. Perhaps I am taking a wrong course, but I cannot help it. I have many friends — no man more; but I have chosen you because you are typical men of the world whose counsel is certain to be sound, and also for another reason — which I will explain in a minute or two."

This was flattering, but rather more serious. Denvil screwed in his monocle, Trant raised his eyebrows and Forbes readjusted his amber tube.

"The queer thing happened when I was staying over a weekend at a friend's house," went on Loveday. "The name of that friend is the one thing I cannot, in any circumstances, reveal; and that leaves it very general and open, for, as you know, I am a constant guest at a great many houses.

"One beautiful moonlit night someone suggested a walk after dinner. I remained indoors, for I was feeling more than a twinge of rheumatism. I was on the way to my room to fetch a book which I had brought with me, when I was startled by a sharp thud in another room which I was passing. With a thought of burglars in my mind I opened the door of that room and switched on the light, when the cause of the noise was at once apparent: a picture had dropped from the wall.

"Would to Heaven I had left it where it fell! Instead, I picked it up and saw that the shock had brought away a section of wood at the back. A paper was protruding from the opening. I had the curiosity to open and look at this paper. It was a certificate of marriage.

"And as I commenced to examine the certificate, the fear, the cruel weight which has been burdening me since, got hold of me. After long consideration I put down a rough copy of the document, replaced the original, adjusted the section of wood, and hung the picture, after repairing the cord, in its former position."

The narrator paused, for agitation had robbed him of breath. He did not look up at the others, who waited in silence.

"I will plunge straight into the situation," continued Loveday, getting a grip on himself. "It was the certificate of a marriage which had been performed in — in another country. Now, my good friend whose hospitality I was enjoying had inherited his fortune from a relative. I have got to be careful to avoid details; yet one detail I must mention, and it is that the relative died without making a will.

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"I think you will now begin to perceive the gravity of the situation. I had apparently discovered an early and a secret marriage. The wife might be alive, or there were possibly children of the marriage; but all at once there rushed upon me the fear that my host and friend was in possession of a property to which he might have no legal right."

Denvil shot in — "No business whatever of yours."

"Quite true, but let him speak," said Trant.

"Rather! Why, this is great!" chuckled Forbes, delightedly.

"No, it did not appear to be my business," Loveday acquiesced. "But it depressed me exceedingly during the remainder of my stay. I felt unable to look my host in the face. Was it possible that a word from me might turn his life upside down, as it were?" The narrator pressed a hand against his forehead. "The truth is, gentlemen, that I was the last man in the world fitted to be haunted by such a secret. I am not by nature or health constituted for it. I told myself hundreds of times that it was not my concern. I made repeated efforts to forget it, but without avail, and after a time they seemed to me to be dishonest efforts. I suppose I thought far too much about it; at any rate, think and think about it I did until I asked myself the straight question — did my duty point to silence or speech?

"I resolved upon a middle course; I would investigate the matter. Perhaps there was nothing in it after all; and hugging this most earnest hope I went abroad, to the Continent, to make my own private inquiries. My copy of the certificate was an absolute guide. I found the district, the village, the church; turned up the formal register. The marriage was inscribed there. I did not stop. My investigations discovered — first, the grave of the woman of the secret marriage, and, second, two children of the union, a young man and a girl a year his junior, both of the peasant class, both poor. I returned to England with my secret intact, and with my anxiety redoubled.

"Gentlemen, beyond a doubt those two children of the dead man whose fine property my nameless friend has stepped into are the true possessors of it by law. Why the marriage was kept secret does not concern us, and we have little to do with the eccentricity that made the husband retain and conceal the certificate in the place he chose. It is a sterner fact that stares us in the face."

There was a silence. It extended; it deepened. Loveday, seemingly expecting a remark, looked up. His guests' eyes were fixed steadily upon him, and they were motionless as statues.

Loveday got up, uneasy under the scrutiny. He said, timidly:

"You will ask — why did I not approach my friend himself, tell him what I knew, and so rid myself of responsibility by placing it upon the shoulders most fitting to receive it? My answer is that I felt I should really

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leave him no option of choice. You see, he would know that *I* knew. Whatever course he might have pursued if the secret had been his alone I cannot tell, but with me looking on, a sense of honor — even decency — would forbid him to tear up the marriage certificate and say, 'This matter shall be buried forever; I have the money, and I mean to keep it for myself.'

"On all this I reflected for many long weeks. I suppose the world will say that I was very foolish to take the affair to heart, but I *did* take it to heart. Finally, it interrupted my peace of mind, my studies, so much that I decided to lay the question before others. You, gentlemen, are in ignorance of the name which is uppermost in my thoughts; but I want you to imagine yourselves in my position, and advise me. Shall I speak, or shall I remain silent? If your opinion is unanimous, I will abide by it."

Loveday resumed his seat, and heaved a sigh of relief. Still no one spoke; still they regarded him in a tense silence. Loveday became restless under it; he fidgeted; he glanced timidly from one to the other.

Suddenly Forbes drawled:

"I say, Loveday, is it one of us?"

The question was hardly spoken before Denvil leaped to his feet, his monocle flying to the length of its cord.

"No — no! You are not to ask that question!" he shouted.

"But unless I am under the influence of a powerful dream, it has already been asked," said Trant, sardonic and grim.

"Then I forbid you to reply to it, Loveday!" flashed Denvil, savagely. "Mind, not a word, man! Not a hint!"

"All right, Denvil," said Loveday, sadly.

Forbes drawled: "Question taken back — root and branch."

"Ah, but it is too late, too late," Trant growled. "Your question, young man, has ignited the powder. If Loveday was not speaking of one of us he would have put out the blaze by a word of denial. He does not make that denial. So. The mischief is done; this possessor of property which belongs to others is one of us three men. Loveday, do you say 'no'?"

Loveday wiped his perspiring forehead. "I have been forbidden to answer," he stammered.

"That's good enough," said Forbes. "One of us it is."

"You idiot, Loveday!" snarled Denvil. "You might have known it would have occurred to us."

"The next question," drawled Forbes, "is which one ——"

"No, no, Loveday! Not a word!" roared Denvil, screwing in his eyeglass and glaring at Loveday menacingly. "If you had approached the man privately it would have been different. Your secret must not be shared by us all. You hear me? Not a whisper."

"All right, Denvil," repeated Loveday, terribly unnerved.

Trant held up a hand. "Do you

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mind if I take the floor?" he requested, calmly. "We have got to proceed carefully here. We are on very thin ice. Loveday, you have said too much — far, far too much, in the opinions of us all; so now, for Heaven's sake, hold your tongue."

Trant got up while speaking, and Forbes dropped lazily into the vacated chair. Trant walked about, talking all the time.

"Let us get a proper focus," said he. "Loveday has implied by his silence that the man is one of us. Loveday has undoubtedly stayed at each of our places. There are acquaintances of his with whom he has spent no weekend, and it would have been better if he had chosen such for his confidants. On the other hand, we can understand his not doing so, doubtless judging that men who had been his hosts would regard the problem with a truer feeling, and therefore give the wisest counsel. The mistake he made was in including the man in this present trio. That was foolish, though all would have been well if Forbes had not asked the embarrassing question, and so upset all the fat all over the fire."

"Sorry," said Forbes, laconically.

"We have all three inherited most of our money," continued Trant. "Doubtless, again, that was why Loveday asked us — wanting, as I say, a feeling verdict."

"It was, indeed, the second of the two reasons I spoke of," cut in Loveday.

"Hold your tongue," snapped Trant again. "And each of us came into his little bit through lack of a will to the contrary. Perhaps, after all, Loveday *was* rather narrowed in his choice of three confidants, for, extensive though his list of friends is, yet he cannot know so very many who have inherited money that way. So far, so good — or, rather, bad. Very fortunately he has not let slip any family details that can make one of us think 'I am the man.' As he remarked, he has left the question very general and open. He did not even name any particular picture or any particular room; and I am sure none of us will have all the pictures down! You, Forbes, may be the man; so might Denvil; so might I. Now, my advice to Loveday, to you fellows, and to myself, is this: drop the matter like a white-hot bar! Away with it absolutely! For, as no one of us *knows* that he is the man concerned, we can with perfect honesty maintain a lifelong silence. What do you say, Denvil?"

"Unquestionably I agree," answered Denvil, instantly.

"Forbes?"

"I bow to your decisions, most wise and reverend seigneurs."

"Right! So now, Loveday, you have the advice — a unanimous advice — that you asked for. You are to put the matter from your mind from tonight."

"You may trust me," said Loveday, meekly.

"And so," said Forbes, rising, "the meeting does not break up in disorder."

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"Not at all," replied Trant. "In perfect accord. Loveday, kindly unchain your whisky and soda."

When Trant, six months later, received from Denvil an earnestly worded request to visit him in his rooms at nine o'clock one evening, he went to the rooms, which were over a gun-shop in Regent Street, and found Forbes and Loveday there. They had arrived ten minutes before him.

At once Trant thought of the subject of the former meeting — if he had ever for a single day forgotten it; and he guessed, with rather a sinking in his heart, that the matter had turned up again. He was not disappointed.

"Sit down, Trant," invited Denvil, moodily. "Forbes and Loveday got here before you. We have met for a consultation. To go straight to the subject, Loveday, by what I must call his cursed noseyness, has completely unsettled me."

"I see that he has. You look far from well."

"And Forbes, for all his seeming lightness of heart, feels the strain. And you, Trant? Are you any happier for a sneaking fear that you are lying on a bed which may not be your bed, and from which some flicker of chance, by letting out the truth, may bundle you neck and crop? Do you like this sensation?"

"It would be odd if he did," laughed Forbes.

"I admit that it is most depressing," allowed Trant. "But ——"

"Oh, Denvil has an idea that lights up all Regent Street," interrupted Forbes.

"Indeed?" said Trant, sceptically. "Why, what idea can possibly help us out of this barbed-wire entanglement?"

"You shall hear," answered Denvil. "Have a cigar. Listen carefully. First and foremost, the peculiar circumstances of the case forbid that one of us should act without the others knowing. Now, I have come to the conclusion that since two of us here have a perfect right — if Loveday's investigations are correct — to a full enjoyment of their property, it seems exceedingly hard that those two should pass the remainder of their lives under a black cloud — a sort of impending sword."

"What my landlady would call the sword of Dammycoles," said Forbes.

"I heartily agree with you, Denvil," assented Trant at once. "Why should we all suffer? On the other hand, it would be most unpleasant if three of us — that includes Loveday — should know the name of the luckless fourth. Loveday has no *right* to make his secret such comparatively common property. Suppose — as he well might — that the luckless fourth determined to keep quiet, to stick to his fortune, to destroy the marriage certificate? We should not, of course, order him to make a clean breast of it. We could not say to him, 'Call in your solicitor and sacrifice all your property.' But he would certainly feel that he stood real bad in our eyes; he

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would forever have a wretched idea that we regarded him as an impostor — to say nothing that he would always dread that one of us might by chance let slip the truth. And this feeling would probably influence his judgment, would force his hand, would make him abandon his fortune — a lifetime of every comfort. It would not be fair, and I don't like the notion."

"Please do not ask me to agree to it," said Loveday, sadly.

"Trant," said Denvil, with strong emphasis, "you have put your finger right on the sore spot which Loveday's lack of diplomacy and Forbes's indelicate question have created. The truth has got to be told, and yet it must not be property common to the rest. Now, how can that be managed? Only by unusual tact, obviously."

"Wanted — a formula," chuckled Forbes.

Denvil continued, choosing his words with extreme care: "We might ask Loveday to go privately to the party concerned and to say to him, 'The beastly thing happened at *your* house.' But that would not do. The rest of us would know it because Loveday didn't come to *us*. But there is a neat way out of the deadlock. We have been discussing it, and here it is.

"In that desk in the corner are envelopes and paper. Loveday is to write on two slips the words *You are not the man*. And on a third slip he will write *You are the man*. Loveday will then hand each one of us a slip, in an envelope, giving the unlucky message to the right person. You will see that by all three of us observing a neutral and discreet bearing, and by promising never to allude to the subject again from that instant, two of us will leave this room relieved of a miserable burden, and that those two *will never know who the man is*."

"That," cried Forbes, "is what I call a brainstorm."

Denvil continued, lucidly: "That one among us who gets the unlucky message has only to keep a stiff upper lip in order to guard his secret. He will then have the sound advantage of choosing his line of conduct unbiased."

"The subject must indeed be forbidden from the very moment that Loveday hands us the notes," said Trant, reflectively.

"We are men of honor," said Denvil, simply.

"I see, I see," added Trant, slowly. "Two of us will go from here with lightened hearts, and neither of those two will know who is up against the mischief."

"Exactly," Denvil insisted; "and the third will be free to choose his line of conduct uninfluenced by criticizing eyes — and that is a great point gained in an affair of such extreme delicacy."

"But Loveday will always know."

"Loveday is different. He will retire into his shell. He came to us for advice, and this is our advice. You are a dear old boy, Loveday, and no one is afraid of you."

Loveday sighed. "I asked for your

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counsel, and I am sure I am ready to accept it," he said. "But I will ask you to think once more before it is too late. Your idea, if carried out, will make one of you unhappy, and I shall be the cause. I thought your former verdict was definite, and now you change it."

"We all change it," answered Denvil, candidly. "We are all ready to take the chance. Now, Loveday, will you kindly go to that desk, turn away from us, and prepare the slips?"

Loveday shook his head sadly, got up, and seated himself at the writing-desk.

"For God's sake make no mistake!" urged Trant.

"I shall make no error," said Loveday, a deep line of anxiety across his forehead.

"I am sure you will not," said Denvil. "Come, you fellows, suppose we look out of the window until Loveday is ready."

They drew aside and stared down at the lights in Regent Street. They heard the rustling of paper, the faint scratching of a pen. It was a minute with a thrill; before it had passed one of the three men must sustain a very heavy blow, and sustain it without turning a hair.

"Reminds me of the time I first backed a horse," whispered Forbes. "It lost."

"I am ready, gentlemen," said Loveday, in a burdened tone.

They at once faced him. With trembling hands Loveday handed an envelope to each of the men. They opened simultaneously, and drew out the enclosed slip.

"Right-o!" said Forbes, carelessly, thrusting paper and envelope into a trouser pocket.

"Very well," said Trant, with perfect calmness.

"So ends the discussion — forever," said Denvil, evenly.

The only one discomposed was Loveday himself, who had turned white as a sheet. They respected his emotion, which they knew was caused by his bringing immense trouble into one of their lives.

There was a short and embarrassed silence, each man avoiding the others' eyes.

"I move that the meeting break up," said Trant, quietly. "Denvil, I will say good night."

"So long, Denvil," said Forbes, following Trant.

Loveday made a simple gesture of farewell.

"Buck up, old son," urged Denvil, venturing a friendly slap on the shoulder. "None of us is going to think the worse of you. You did the right and proper thing, and you must not fret. Good night to you."

Denvil, left alone, listened to the retreating footsteps on his stairs. Then he took from his clenched palm the crushed slip of paper and looked at it a second time. It bore the words:

You are not the man.

Denvil drew a deep, deep breath of relief. "Trant or Forbes?" he murmured. "I wonder!"

Outside, Loveday, Trant, and

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Forbes went different ways. Next time they met they would be able to chat with customary familiarity; at the moment a sense of restraint was on their tongues and in their faces.

Loveday hailed a taxi and went home. Trant entered a restaurant and ordered a light supper. Forbes climbed on top of a motor-bus.

As the motor-bus rumbled pleasantly towards Piccadilly Circus, Forbes pulled the slip of paper from his trouser pocket. He smoothed the creases and read as follows:

You are not the man.

Forbes stared long and hard at that simple line. His mood was unusually reflective. Presently he tore the paper into bits and scattered them upon the unsuspecting hats of the people in the Circus.

"Denvil or Trant?" he muttered. "I wonder!"

When Trant had ordered his meagre supper he sat and stared at it in an abstract sort of way. An orchestra was playing the gayest waltz from the gayest revue, but that did not lessen his solemnity. After a long interval of thoughtfulness he extracted his particular slip, which he had read in Denvil's room; but instead of taking it from the covering envelope he pushed both under his plate, and commenced to eat, absently, moodily.

When Loveday reached home he tossed his hat and overcoat on a chair, sank into another one, and covered his pale face with both hands. He remained in that posture for a long time, resting his tired nerves — or perhaps fretting them. At last he rose, very wearily.

"Six months ago I asked for their advice," said he, petulantly, "and they gave it. It was the advice which, in my heart, I yearned for. Oh, why did they change it? It was a salve to my conscience; it soothed me; it made me almost forget. I put the case to them as hard-headed men of the world, deciding to take their answer as final. And I did take it as final. And now they have upset everything, and I stand just where I did at the wretched beginning."

He pressed his palms to his temples and went on:

"Why could they not let well alone? Yet I ought not to say that, because it is clear that six months of reflection taught them it was not well. The trouble was that they jumped to the conclusion that it *was* one of themselves. I did not want that to happen. God knows I didn't want that to occur. At any rate, I didn't *say* that it was. It was Forbes's blundering question. I might have said 'no' instantly; but I was horribly afraid they would suspect the truth; that they would say — 'Is it *you*, Loveday? Are you covering yourself by subterfuge?' I felt so wretchedly guilty. The fact that I *was* alluding to myself seemed to burn in my cheeks. And then I thought that if they went on believing it was one of themselves I should get a more — comforting advice. Anyhow, they blundered into the error, and I did not contradict it.

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"A minute afterwards I felt it was too late. How could I say to them: 'The incident happened in my own house. I created a wholly imaginary friend in an entirely imaginary house because I funked the truth'? I ought to have said it directly they made their mistake, but I couldn't — I couldn't. Yet that would have been a true statement. The house was this house — mine; the picture was my picture. I wanted absolutely disinterested advice, unmixed by pity or the feelings of friendship, and I wanted it without giving myself away. And now they have turned everything upside down, and I stand precisely where I did when I discovered that dreadful marriage certificate against me.

"There it is — behind that picture in the corner. What ought I to do? Take it to my solicitor? How easy that sounds! But who with a fine fortune jumps at a chance of yielding it to a stranger? And yet if I don't, I doubt if I shall ever know peace of mind. If I tear it up and hold my tongue, who will know? Not Denvil, or Trant, or Forbes, for they are sworn to silence. But if they ever *should* get talking with each other —— No, they are men of honor, and promised. Shall I throw it all up?"

Loveday dropped into a chair again and was silent. He felt that he would go on thinking about it for years.

It was at that moment that Trant pulled his slip from under his plate and read the words:

You are not the man.

"Forbes or Denvil?" he murmured. "I wonder which of them it is!"

Note:

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You may recall that we published Mary Adams Sarett's first story — "Subject to Review," in our issue of July 1949 — and that this first story was a remarkably fine piece of work to have been written by an author just breaking into print. Now, a little more than two years later, we have another story from Mrs. Sarett, and it is completely different from her first one. "Subject to Review" was a brilliantly authentic documentary detective story, in which, in a very real sense, the President of the United States was the detective. "Buck Fever," the second story, is projected as the curtain-raiser of a series about the North Woods and the modicum of civilization to be found in that region. The subject matter and the setting have been in Mrs. Sarett's mind for some time, recurring each year when she and her husband make their annual hunting and fishing trip to Canada. It will not surprise you, therefore, again to find a convincing authenticity in Mrs. Sarett's work.

The great forests of the North, Mrs. Sarett reminds us, create their own mysteries, without any help from fictional minds; these almost primeval woods and rivers and lakes harbor life and death in a thousand forms. To the woodsman there is often little difference between Nature's plan of destruction and man's . . .

BUCK FEVER

by MARY ADAMS SARETT

THE ISLAND CURLED LIKE A SLEEPing cat. Alders and hardhack bristled on its back and the water lapped at its toes. It was a cold, gray day. The fevered colors of autumn were gone, leaving the maples stripped and dull, the pine trees olive-drab.

Two hundred feet from the shore the woods took on a richer hue, an intensity and opulence they never lost. Here the forest gave sanctuary, magnifying each sound, yet muffling the breath and form of its creatures.

Closer to the shore, but not seen from the lake, was a log cabin. It was not so small as a trapper's shack nor so large as a cottage. It had a porch. It had glass in its windows but the panes were dirty and cracked. On the front door someone had nailed a newspaper clipping which said that the courteous camper chopped wood and left it for whoever might come after; this was, the yellowed paper said, a code of the woods.

Inside the cabin was a wood stove, black and rusted and littered with ashes and scraps of paper and splinters

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of kindling wood. There were two tiered bunks, making four in all, each with springs that were more like chicken wire, and pine boughs were laid over these. Two of the bunks had blankets and pillows on them. One bunk also had a mattress, but the mice had fought for this, and won. Against one wall of the cabin was a long unpainted table with a bench beside it to sit on. On top of the table were a kerosene lamp and two candles stuck in whiskey bottles. There was a broom in the corner, a frying pan on the wall, a shelf with a pan, a pail, and a kettle on it, and a cabinet containing plates, cups, two glasses, knives, forks, spoons, coffee, a box of matches, a roll of paper toweling, a bar of soap, a can of oil, a saw, an axe, a Canadian quarter, several fish hooks, and a draw-string bag of tobacco. That was all except for the two suitcases on the floor and a pack filled at the top with cans of baked beans.

Just before sundown, two men in a canoe came toward the cabin. They paddled with deep short strokes, quartering their craft into the wind that swelled in the trees and drove out across the lake. The canoe plunged toward shore. The two men sweated, and cursed the rocks that sawed the water or squatted below its surface. At last, close to the shore, the man in the bow stopped paddling and leaned over the prow. He held his paddle in the water ahead of him and peered down, feeling a deep, safe lane for the canoe to pass through and ease itself onto the land. Here he climbed out and pulled the canoe after him until his companion could step out in the same dry spot. Then they both pulled. They laid their paddles on the ground and turned the canoe over them, its green-painted bottom upturned to the hurrying sky. The men stood a moment, panting, and their shoulders sagged. When their breaths had calmed, they turned and started up to the cabin. Both men were carrying guns.

The man who had been in the front of the canoe walked ahead. He shook his head back and forth. The other man walked slowly, dragging the butt of his rifle on the pine-needle path.

"Those blasted rocks," the first man said. "Wouldn't want to cross that lake at night."

"What's that, Jim?"

Jim looked back over his shoulder. "I said, this lake's no place for a man who can't swim."

"The canoe'd float," the other said.

"Maybe," said Jim, "but I wouldn't."

His companion said nothing. He was not really listening.

When they reached the cabin they propped their guns up on the porch with the muzzles against the side of the house. The man whose name was not Jim opened the door. A rush of wind almost took the door from his hand.

"Leave the door on, Will," Jim said. "Sure as the devil's going to freeze tonight."

The two men entered the cabin. It was warmer here, but not much. Jim

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put his hand flat on the stove and grunted.

"Better get that bottle out," he said. "Keep our stomachs warm, anyhow." He went back out on the porch.

Will sat down on the bench and began to unlace his boots. When he had one boot unlaced he stopped and took off his gloves. He took hold of his cap by the visor, jerked it off his head and threw it at his bunk. The cap hit the bunk and slid off onto the floor. He stared at the bright red leather.

Jim came through the door and kicked it shut behind him. His arms were laden with split logs and slat-like pieces of wood. He peered over the load at Will, and looked away again. Will did not look up.

"All day and this stuff hasn't dried out yet," Jim said. "Got any paper?"

Will shook his head. Jim straightened his arms and the wood crashed down on the floor. He went to the cabinet, opened it and took out a roll of paper towel. He tore off several sheets, crumpled them and thrust them through the open door of the stove. Then he put the wood in, first the small flat pieces, next the logs. He struck a match from his pocket and lit the paper. As the flames sprang up he reached into his pocket again and brought out scraps of paper, some of it colored, with writing on it, and thrust them down in between the logs. He fanned the iron door until the fire caught hold of the kindling. Then he left it and went and sat on the bench near Will.

"How about a drink?"

"I could use it," said Will. He rose from the bench and crossed to his suitcase. He bent down, rummaged, and straightened up with a bottle in his hand. "Last one," he said.

"Okay. We can make a dent in it." Jim got up and went to the cupboard again. He took the two glasses from the shelf and dipped them into the pail which had about three inches of water in it. Then, with the glasses a quarter-full, he took them to Will who filled them to the top with whiskey. Jim sat down and took off his hat. Both men unzipped their jackets, leaned their arms on the table, and circled their glasses with loving hands. They drank. Sighing, they took the whiskey away from their lips and studied its amber glow.

"Well," said Will, "I really botched it up."

Jim drank again. "Buck fever's common enough," he said.

"You shouldn't have waited," Will said. "You should have shot when I didn't."

"We agreed it was your turn."

Will drank deeply. "It was too easy. Standing there like that. Would have been murder to shoot it."

"Depends on how you look at it," said Jim.

"I can't understand it. I've shot deer before."

"Hard sometimes. Don't worry about it."

"I've shot about everything," Will said. "I even killed men in the war. But I couldn't shoot that doe."

"No one said you had to shoot it,"

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said Jim. He sounded tired. "You don't have to shoot anything you don't want to."

"It's the first time I've come home without anything."

"Heck, man, you're not home yet. You still have tomorrow morning."

"We'll never get another break like that."

"You're a good shot," Jim said. "You don't need a standing target." He reached for the bottle.

"Better put some water in," said Will. "It lasts longer that way."

Jim took the glasses to the pail again. This time he had to tip it to get the water in the glasses. Will poured the whiskey, careful to see each got the same. The bottle was almost half-full.

"Funny," Will said, "about that deer."

"Forget it," said Jim.

"No, I mean the way it looked. If it was a buck I could have shot it all right. But that doe looked familiar."

Jim grunted.

"It looked like Moira," Will said.

Jim laughed. "That'll please her."

"She'll know, of course," said Will. "Only the way she'll tell it, the deer was after me and I was afraid to shoot it."

"She knows you're not a coward. Everybody knows that."

"Then I'd be a coward not to tell her, wouldn't I?"

"I don't know. Tell her, then. Tell her anything you please. Tomorrow We'll both shoot."

"You know," Will said, "I read in some magazine where a psychiatrist says buck fever isn't properly understood."

"That so?" said Jim.

"The way he said, a man who has buck fever is just plain scared."

"That doesn't make sense," Jim said. "You know you weren't scared."

"Well, I'd be scared to shoot Moira," Will said.

"Who wants you to shoot Moira? Good Lord, man, snap out of it!"

"Yeah. Only I can't get it out of my mind how much they looked alike. Moira ever look at you like that?"

"Like a deer? No."

"I guess not. She admires you, Jim."

"Well, that's fine."

"Did you ever have buck fever, Jim?"

"No. Some people don't."

"Yes, that's the type my wife admires."

"That psychiatrist's all wet," Jim said.

"So's the wood," said Will.

He emptied his glass, stood up, and walked over to the stove. He lifted the round top and peered down at the logs. The wood was smoking but the fire had burned the paper towels and died. Will shivered. "This paper should be underneath," he said.

Jim put down his glass and stood up. "I'll fix it."

Will reached in and pulled out the scraps of paper from between the cold logs. "I'll just stuff it in here

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and get some more," he said. "It'll burn pretty soon."

Jim watched him glance at the papers in his hand, crumple them, and shove them in underneath.

"I'll get more towels," Jim said, and went to the cabinet.

Will followed him with eyes that held the glitter of whiskey. When Jim turned, Will walked over to the pail and looked in it. "Need more water," he said. "Tastes better that way."

Jim said nothing. Will took the pail and went out. He kicked the door shut behind him.

Jim stared at the door, the paper towels dangling from his hand. Then he crossed to the stove. The wood and paper steamed. A smell like tar came out from them. Jim mashed the towels in his hand and shoved them into the stove. He lit the paper and watched it burn for a while. The flames caught better this time.

Jim looked again at the cabin door, but Will did not return. He went back to the table, sat down on the bench, and poured whiskey into his glass. He drank it and looked back at the door.

The door opened. "Cripes, it's cold," Will said. He did not look at Jim. In one hand he held the pail now filled with water; in his other hand he held his gun. He set the pail on the shelf and went to his bunk and sat down. The rifle lay across his knees. "There's your water," he said.

"You having one?" said Jim.

"Not just yet," Will said.

Jim took his own glass to the pail, dipped it, returned to the table and filled the glass with whiskey.

"You thinking of going out after that deer tonight?" He nodded at Will's gun.

"No," said Will. "Not tonight."

Jim drank swiftly. He could not see Will's face in the shadow made by the upper bunk. "Look," he said, "if there's anything else on your mind, maybe you'd better spill it."

Will did not speak.

"I guess you saw that letter," Jim said.

"Yes," said Will. "I saw it."

"Well, don't jump to conclusions."

"That's one conclusion I should have jumped to a long time ago," Will said.

"No," Jim said, "you're wrong. Moira wrote me when I was in Chicago. Just a friendly letter."

"I didn't read it," said Will.

"No reason why you should. Nothing to it."

"I didn't have to read it," Will said. "I've known for a long time there was somebody. I didn't know it was you."

"It wasn't," said Jim.

"That explains why Moira was so anxious to have us come here together."

"Well, that proves something, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Will said. "It proves something."

"Have a drink, Will. You're imagining things."

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"All right," said Will. "Make it straight."

Jim poured two inches of whiskey into Will's glass and set the glass down again. "Look," he said, "why don't you take that gun outside. Guns and whiskey don't mix."

Will held out his hand and Jim rose and took the drink to him.

"Thanks," said Will.

Jim returned to the table, struck a match, and lit the two candles. The light flickered over Will's face and picked up the chrome of the gun's action.

"In a way I don't blame you," Will said. "Moira's like that. I'd do anything to keep her. I suppose any man would."

"There are things more important than a woman," said Jim.

"Are there, Jim?"

"To me, yes."

"But it would have been so easy," Will said. "Why didn't you do it this afternoon?"

"Do what?"

"Hunting accidents happen all the time." He smiled. "Maybe you had buck fever too."

"You're crazy," said Jim. "Or drunk. Do you mean to tell me you think I came up here to shoot you?"

"I don't blame you, Jim," Will said again. "Moira could make a man do that."

"Listen," said Jim. "This is one heck of a conversation. Will you give me that gun?"

Will shook his head. "The gun's all right," he said.

"Sure the gun's all right. But you're not." Jim stood up. "Do you think that deer's going to come in here so you can take a shot at him?"

"There're other things to shoot besides deer," Will said.

Jim looked at him. "Meaning me?"

The reflection of the candlelight burned deep in Will's eyes. "Could mean you," he said.

Jim sat down again. Without looking at the bottle he groped for it and emptied the remaining drops into his glass. He held the glass in front of him and studied it.

"Will," he said, "what's happened to you?"

Will shook his head.

Jim emptied the whiskey into his mouth. He sat fingering the glass, revolving it in his hand.

"Will," he said softly, "we've been friends for fifteen years. Moira — even if it were true about Moira and me — she isn't worth that."

"Maybe it isn't Moira at all," Will said. "I've known for a long time I'd lost Moira. But I thought you were my friend, Jim."

Jim set the glass down hard on the table and pushed it from him; the glass turned over and rolled against the empty whiskey bottle with a sharp unreverberating chime. Jim rose and started toward the door.

"Going out?" said Will.

Jim stopped and half-faced Will. "I'm going to get my gun," he said. "You're not a coward, Will. I don't believe you'd shoot a man without giving him a chance."

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"I don't know," Will said. "But your gun's empty, Jim. The cartridges are in my pocket."

Jim's hand was on the latch of the door. He left it there. He stood with his back to Will, his forehead bowed against the door. Then he turned slowly.

"When's it going to be, Will?"

"I don't know," Will said. "Not for a while."

Neither man spoke for a minute.

"Then if you've no objections," said Jim, "I'll get some more wood. It's getting cold in here."

"All right," Will said.

Jim opened the door. There was a rush of wind and of moonlight, and the door slammed shut behind him.

It was very still in the cabin. Will sat on the bunk with the gun in his lap and he seemed to be listening. One of the candles had blown out in the wind and the other glowed morosely. Will listened. At last there was a sound — a soft sound of an object dragged or pushed, and the splash of something in water.

Will sighed, took the gun from his knees, and stood it up by the wall. He rose to his feet with an effort, as though his body pained him. He walked to the door. When he opened it the moonlight swam around his feet and the wind rushed at his clothing. The flame behind him died. He stood there in the doorway with his jacket flapping, like a huge cliff bird half in, half out of its cave.

The moonlight flowed down the path to the water, spread in a bright pool on the landing beach. Nothing was there. On the lake the water rocked its black and silver waves.

Will strained his eyes and saw nothing more. He strained his ears. And after a while he heard it. He heard his own name called — twice. That was all.

He went back into the cabin. The moonlight followed him and made queer shapes on the walls. *Will*, it wrote, *WILL*. . . . He turned away and shut the door. In the dark he found the candles and lit them.

The door of the cabinet on the wall had swung open and from it Will took the roll of paper towel. He tore off a sheet and went back to the table. Then he reached into his pocket and took out a hunting knife. He drew the knife gently from its scabbard and wiped the blade with the paper towel. He spread the paper out flat on the table and shook the scabbard over it. When he had finished he examined the paper. There were splinters of green paint on it and pieces that looked like canvas. He folded the paper in over the particles and held it up to the flame of the candle. The flame took hold. He carried the paper torch to the stove and pushed it in.

Against the wall he saw his gun. He went to it, and as if he could think of nothing to do but what he had done before, he sat down on the bunk and laid the rifle across his knees. But he was not listening now, or waiting.

"Tomorrow," he said aloud to the gun, "tomorrow we'll get that doe."

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"I shall try to correct errors . . ."

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN
in a letter to Horace Greeley

One of the most important discoveries made by Howard Haycraft and revealed in his history of the detective story, MURDER FOR PLEASURE, *is the fact that Abraham Lincoln was "the first of the countless eminent men who have turned to the detective story for stimulation and solace." Lincoln was "pleased with the absolute and logical method of Poe's tales and sketches, in which the problem of mystery is given, and wrought out into everyday facts by processes of cunning analysis." It was said, on unimpeachable authority, that Lincoln permitted no year to pass without rereading Poe's tales of ratiocination.*

But while it is now established that Abraham Lincoln was a detective-story fan, it is not so well-known that he also wrote at least one murder story. Biographers of Lincoln have mentioned it; for example, Ward H. Lamon, in his LIFE OF LINCOLN, *wrote: "In the summer of 1841, Mr. Lincoln was engaged in a curious case. The circumstances impressed him very deeply with the insufficiency and danger of 'circumstantial evidence,' so much so, that he not only wrote the account of it to Speed, but another more extended one, which was printed in a newspaper published at Quincy, Ill. His mind was full of it; he could think of nothing else."*

But it was left for Roger W. Barrett, of Chicago, to dig into musty old newspaper files and find the actual story written by Abraham Lincoln. It is the tale of four men who went out for a walk in the spring of 1841 — and only three came back. Five years later Abraham Lincoln wrote the story of this mysterious disappearance and of the murder trial which followed. Lincoln was no mere spectator of the events; he did not get his facts at second-hand. As Mr. Barrett has described it, on the arrest of the three men who came back, "a lanky young lawyer of the town stretched his long legs under a wooden table at the Butler boarding house, snuffed his tallow candle, whittled his turkey quill to a clean pen point," and with Logan, his law-partner at that time, Lincoln became the defense attorney for the accused.

Abraham Lincoln's story of "The Trailor Murder Mystery" was published in the Quincy "Whig" of April 15, 1846 — five years, almost to the day, after the earliest appearance of the world's first detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," by Edgar A. Poe; three years after the first

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book-appearance of THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE; *and only one year after the publication of Poe's* TALES.

Abraham Lincoln's personal opinion of the case may be found near the end of his story. Mr. Lincoln wrote: "It may well be doubted whether a stranger affair ever really occurred."

THE TRAILOR MURDER MYSTERY

by ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IN THE YEAR 1841, THERE RESIDED, at different points in the State of Illinois, three brothers by the name of Trailor. Their Christian names were William, Henry and Archibald. Archibald resided at Springfield, then as now the seat of Government of the State. He was a sober, retiring, and industrious man, of about thirty years of age; a carpenter by trade, and a bachelor, boarding with his partner in business — a Mr. Myers. Henry, a year or two older, was a man of like retiring and industrious habits; had a family, and resided with it on a farm, at Clary's Grove, about twenty miles distant from Springfield in a north-westerly direction. — William, still older, and with similar habits, resided on a farm in Warren county, distant from Springfield something more than a hundred miles in the same North-westerly direction. He was a widower, with several children.

In the neighborhood of William's residence, there was, and had been for several years, a man by the name of Fisher, who was somewhat above the age of fifty; had no family, and no settled home; but who boarded and lodged a while here and a while there, with persons for whom he did little jobs of work. His habits were remarkably economical, so that an impression got about that he had accumulated a considerable amount of money.

In the latter part of May, in the year mentioned, William formed the purpose of visiting his brothers at Clary's Grove and Springfield; and Fisher, at the time having his temporary residence at his house, resolved to accompany him. They set out together in a buggy with a single horse. On Sunday evening they reached Henry's residence, and staid over night. On Monday Morning, being the first Monday of June, they started on to Springfield, Henry accompanying them on horseback. They reached town about noon, met Archibald, went with him to his boarding house, and there took up their lodgings for the time they should remain.

After dinner, the three Trailors and Fisher left the boarding house in

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company, for the avowed purpose of spending the evening together in looking about the town. At supper, the Trailors had all returned, but Fisher was missing, and some inquiry was made about him. After supper, the Trailors went out professedly in search of him. One by one they returned, the last coming in after late tea time, and each stating that he had been unable to discover anything of Fisher.

The next day, both before and after breakfast, they went professedly in search again, and returned at noon, still unsuccessful. Dinner again being had, William and Henry expressed a determination to give up the search, and start for their homes. This was remonstrated against by some of the boarders about the house, on the ground that Fisher was somewhere in the vicinity, and would be left without any conveyance, as he and William had come in the same buggy. The remonstrance was disregarded, and they departed for their homes respectively.

Up to this time, the knowledge of Fisher's mysterious disappearance had spread very little beyond the few boarders at Myers', and excited no considerable interest. After the lapse of three or four days, Henry returned to Springfield, for the ostensible purpose of making further search for Fisher. Procuring some of the boarders, he, together with them and Archibald, spent another day in ineffectual search, when it was again abandoned, and he returned home.

No general interest was yet excited.

On the Friday, week after Fisher's disappearance, the Postmaster at Springfield received a letter from the Postmaster nearest William's residence, in Warren county, stating that William had returned home without Fisher, and was saying, rather boastfully, that Fisher was dead, and had willed him his money, and that he had got about fifteen hundred dollars by it. The letter further stated that William's story and conduct seemed strange, and desired the Postmaster at Springfield to ascertain and write what was the truth in the matter.

The Postmaster at Springfield made the letter public, and at once, excitement became universal and intense. Springfield, at that time, had a population of about 3,500, with a city organization. The Attorney General of the State resided there. A purpose was forthwith formed to ferret out the mystery, in putting which into execution, the Mayor of the city and the Attorney General took the lead: To make search for, and, if possible, find the body of the man supposed to be murdered, was resolved on as the first step.

In pursuance of this, men were formed into large parties, and marched abreast, in all directions, so as to let no inch of ground in the vicinity remain unsearched. Examinations were made of cellars, wells, and pits of all descriptions, where it was thought possible the body might be concealed. All the fresh, or tolerably fresh graves in the graveyard, were

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pried into, and dead horses and dead dogs were disintered, where, in some instances, they had been buried by their partial masters.

This search, as has appeared, commenced on Friday. It continued until Saturday afternoon without success, when it was determined to despatch officers to arrest William and Henry, at their residences, respectively. The officers started on Sunday morning, meanwhile, the search for the body was continued, and rumors got afloat of the Trailors having passed, at different times and places, several gold pieces, which were readily supposed to have belonged to Fisher.

On Monday, the officers sent for Henry, having arrested him, arrived with him. The Mayor and Attorney Gen'l took charge of him, and set their wits to work to elicit a discovery from him. He denied, and denied, and persisted in denying. They still plied him in every conceivable way, till Wednesday, when, protesting his own innocence, he stated that his brothers, William and Archibald, had murdered Fisher; that they had killed him, without his (Henry's) knowledge at the time, and made a temporary concealment of his body; that, immediately preceding his and William's departure from Springfield for home, on Tuesday, the day after Fisher's disappearance, William and Archibald communicated the fact to him, and engaged his assistance in making a permanent concealment of the body; that, at the time he and William left professedly for home, they did not take the road directly, but, meandering their way through the streets, entered the woods at the North West of the city, two or three hundred yards to the right of where the road they should have travelled, entered them; that, penetrating the woods some few hundred yards, they halted and Archibald came a somewhat different route, on foot, and joined them; that William and Archibald then stationed him (Henry) on an old and disused road that ran near by, as a sentinel, to give warning of the approach of any intruder; that William and Archibald then removed the buggy to the edge of a dense brush thicket, about forty yards distant from his (Henry's) position, where, leaving the buggy, they entered the thicket, and in a few minutes returned with the body, and placed it in the buggy; that from his station he could and did distinctly see that the object placed in the buggy was a dead man, of the general appearance and size of Fisher; that William and Archibald then moved off with the buggy in the direction of Hickox's mill pond, and after an absence of half an hour, returned, saying they had put him in a safe place; that Archibald then left for town, and he and William found their way to the road, and made for their homes.

At this disclosure, all lingering credulity was broken down, and excitement rose to an almost inconceivable height. Up to this time, the well-known character of Archibald

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had repelled and put down all suspicions as to him. Till then, those who were ready to swear that a murder had been committed, were almost as confident that Archibald had had no part in it. But now, he was seized and thrown into jail; and indeed, his personal security rendered it by no means objectionable to him.

And now came the search for the brush thicket, and the search of the mill pond. The thicket was found, and the buggy tracks at the point indicated. At a point within the thicket, the signs of a struggle were discovered, and a trail from thence to the buggy track was traced. In attempting to follow the track of the buggy from the thicket, it was found to proceed in the direction of the mill pond, but could not be traced all the way. At the pond, however, it was found that a buggy had been backed down to, and partially into the water's edge.

Search was now to be made in the pond; and it was made in every imaginable way. Hundreds and hundreds were engaged in raking, fishing, and draining. After much fruitless effort in this way, on Thursday morning the mill dam was cut down, and the water of the pond partially drawn off, and the same processes of search again gone through with.

About noon of this day, the officer sent for William, returned having him in custody; and a man calling himself Dr. Gilmore, came in company with them. It seems that the officer arrested William at his own house, early in the day on Tuesday, and started to Springfield with him; that after dark awhile, they reached Lewiston, in Fulton county, where they stopped for the night; that late in the night this Dr. Gilmore arrived, stating that Fisher was alive at his house, and that he had followed on to give the information, so that William might be released without further trouble; that the officer, distrusting Dr. Gilmore, refused to release William, but brought him on to Springfield, and the Dr. accompanied them.

On reaching Springfield, the Dr. re-asserted that Fisher was alive, and at his house. At this, the multitude for a time, were utterly confounded. Gilmore's story was communicated to Henry Trailor, who without faltering, reaffirmed his own story about Fisher's murder. Henry's adherence to his own story was communicated to the crowd, and at once the idea started, and became nearly, if not quite universal, that Gilmore was a confederate of the Trailors, and had invented the tale he was telling, to secure their release and escape.

Excitement was again at its zenith.

About three o'clock the same evening, Myers, Archibald's partner, started with a two-horse carriage, for the purpose of ascertaining whether Fisher was alive, as stated by Gilmore, and if so, of bringing him back to Springfield with him.

On Friday a legal examination was gone into before two Justices, on the charge of murder against William and Archibald. Henry was introduced as a

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witness by the prosecution, and on oath re-affirmed his statements, as heretofore detailed, and at the end of which he bore a thorough and rigid cross-examination without faltering or exposure. The prosecution also proved, by a respectable lady, that on the Monday evening of Fisher's disappearance, she saw Archibald, whom she well knew, and another man whom she did not then know, but whom she believed at the time of testifying to be William, (then present,) and still another, answering the description of Fisher, all enter the timber at the North West of town, (the point indicated by Henry,) and after one or two hours, saw William and Archibald return without Fisher.

Several other witnesses testified, that on Tuesday, at the time William and Henry professedly gave up the search for Fisher's body, and started for home, they did not take the road directly, but did go into the woods, as stated by Henry. By others, also, it was proved, that since Fisher's disappearance, William and Archibald had passed rather an unusual number of gold pieces. The statements heretofore made about the thicket, the signs of a struggle, the buggy tracks, &c., were fully proven by numerous witnesses.

At this the prosecution rested.

Dr. Gilmore was then introduced by the defendants. He stated that he resided in Warren county, about seven miles distant from William's residence; that on the morning of William's arrest, he was out from home, and heard of the arrest, and of its being on a charge of the murder of Fisher; that on returning to his own house, he found Fisher there; that Fisher was in very feeble health, and could give no rational account as to where he had been during his absence; that he (Gilmore) then started in pursuit of the officer, as before stated; and that he should have taken Fisher with him, only that the state of his health did not permit. Gilmore also stated that he had known Fisher for several years, and that he had understood he was subject to temporary derangement of mind, owing to an injury about his head received in early life.

There was about Dr. Gilmore so much of the air and manner of truth, that his statement prevailed in the minds of the audience and of the court, and the Trailors were discharged, although they attempted no explanation of the circumstances proven by the other witnesses.

On the next Monday, Myers arrived in Springfield, bringing with him the now famed Fisher, in full life and proper person.

Thus ended this strange affair and while it is readily conceived that a writer of novels could bring a story to a more perfect climax, it may well be doubted whether a stranger affair ever really occurred. Much of the matter remains in mystery to this day. The going into the woods with Fisher, and returning without him, by the Trailors; their going into the

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woods at the same place the next day, after they professed to have given up the search; the signs of a struggle in the thicket, the buggy tracks at the edge of it; and the location of the thicket, and the signs about it, corresponding precisely with Henry's story, are circumstances that have never been explained. William and Archibald have both died since — William in less than a year, and Archibald in about two years after the supposed murder. Henry is still living, but never speaks of the subject.

It is not the object of the writer of this to enter into the many curious speculations that might be indulged upon the facts of this narrative; yet he can scarcely forbear a remark upon what would, almost certainly, have been the fate of William and Archibald, had Fisher not been found alive. It seems he had wandered away in mental derangement, and, had he died in this condition, and his body been found in the vicinity, it is difficult to conceive what could have saved the Trailors from the consequence of having murdered him. Or, if he had died, and his body never found, the case against them would have been quite as bad, for, although it is a principle of law that a conviction for murder shall not be had, unless the body of the deceased be discovered, it is to be remembered, that Henry testified that he saw Fisher's dead body.

EDITORS' NOTE: *Roger W. Barrett's account of Abraham Lincoln's murder mystery ended with the following paragraph, which we feel is too good to be omitted.* "*In 1845,*" *wrote Mr. Barrett,* "*Logan & Lincoln secured a judgment of $100 against the administrator of the estate for defending Archibald Trailor in the murder case, but, as with many of the unusual incidents in this strange affair, the judgment still remains unsatisfied.*"

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A FOOL FOR HER

by OLIVER LA FARGE

ON HIS WAY HOME HE HAD STOPPED at Pedro's hut, by request, to help adjust the matter of Pedro's daughter's bride price. Both sets of parents were there, several grandparents, uncles; respectable, settled persons who deferred to his judgment. It was one of those cases in which a minor, almost irrelevant matter had been allowed by friction to cloud the main issue. He cleared it up easily. Though he was tired, as always, from the varied demands on mind and body of his work, and the long day's heat, he enjoyed the occasion, the respect he received from these people. He rode the rest of the way to his quarters as the heat relaxed with the coming of evening, at ease with himself, enjoying the approach to rest, the Indians' scattered huts under the palms, the low-voiced greetings they sent out to him.

At his door, the boy took his horse. A family kept house for him, the parents alone being officially hired, but all acting as his people, performing established duties.

"Don Elogio brought the post," the boy said. "He had to go on to La Loma, so he just left it here, and a telegram for you. He says there is a receipt to sign."

"Very well. Thanks."

He walked in, tossing his hat aside, and slumped into his hammock. The telegram, of course. The whole thing had gone quite out of mind while he was at the ruin; during the ride home, he might have been himself long ago, before he was married. Now it came alive again. Good news, long anticipated. Phoebe was coming to the bush at last. He wanted it, longed for it, longed for her. Contentment vanished, he was restless, reluctant to the proof. His fingers delayed over the blue envelope, then tore it open.

It was brief enough, dated from the capital and three days delayed coming in from Santa Ana, the English mildly corrupted in transit.

LANDED OK HOTEL INTERNACIONAL ARRIVING SANTA ANA THURSDY FOURTEEN THLOVE PHOEBE.

"Thlove" ought to mean something. The vision of his wife rose up before him, as it did sometimes during Caribbean nights aboard ship, on the way home; the porcelain delicacy of her lips and nostrils, deep eyes, fair, wavy hair, her whiteness, filling him with a pain of longing, the hope which knew itself vain that this time, this time that swift, lost period of union would be found again.

The old woman came in with supper dishes, followed by her daughter, Paquita. He answered their greetings, and delayed telling them the definite, long expected news. He did not feel

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hungry. Along with two others, an envelope with Bill's rough writing on it awaited him. He let it lie.

"A bottle of beer, please, Paquita."

"*Muy bien.*"

At his desk, and here in the bush, he became real, competent, whole. He had thought, when he married her, a sophomore, that she would recognize the power of his academic work, but that was ridiculous for Phoebe's shining loveliness. Funny she ever took him. The refused suspicion that his income tipped a commercial balance poisoned the roots of his thought. Here, in his own section of the tropics, he was a man. The respect of these Indians, the habit of authority, handling of men, skill, even brilliance in the management of the excavations, surely these would tell. He was happy and complete here as nowhere else, no longer shy or absent-minded. She would see him as a man.

Paquita brought his beer. She was young, full-ripe, and he knew that if he wished — he was different here. But he did not really believe he could change Phoebe. Even to him she would give tenderness, *faute de mieux*, he supposed, or because there was so much of it in her. He ached for it.

Here was food, and Bill's letter still waiting. He sat down at the table, laying the envelope beside his cup. Throw it away, perhaps. It's the document, the data. One must know — thinking like a scientist, she'd ridicule him for it. He took some food, a long drink, and opened the letter.

"You asked for it, so I'll give it to you, though I suppose it only means that you'll stop being my friend. Of course, your house has been full of football players & such all winter, a kind of undergraduate club. That's no news to you, and might be nothing. But on the boat coming down, conclusions were unavoidable. Had almost no passengers and old Schultz for captain — you know him. Well, Lew, she started on me. I let her run a little, to find out, but she got me so mad & disgusted I finally was pretty rough with her. It wasn't just the *intention* to be unfaithful, she was *disgusting*. Then she got hold of the quartermaster, a big dumb young brute. I broke that up pretty well & in doing so saw plenty. Lew, you say you're half-crazy over it. You asked me to watch and tell you straight what I thought. I've gone this far so I guess I might as well go the whole way. She's a beautiful bitch — and *you know it*. She's abnormal. For God's sake, amigo, divorce her or push her over a cliff.

"I suppose you'll never speak to me again for this, but you asked for it, and I couldn't be your friend & do otherwise.

"She leaves for Santa Ana the fourteenth, I believe. Why did you bring her out? I leave on the fifteenth for Chapopote, the old diggings.

"Yours,

Bill."

He put it down and ate on mechanically, until he realized he felt sick. He moved to the door. Bill's wrong about that. I can take it.

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"And *you know it.*" True, but for so long he had avoided perceiving his own shame. Notorious, too — even to undergraduates. The things one avoided hearing, or succeeded in not putting into their context.

Divorce her. He couldn't do it. Her special, long-limbed beauty — with her highest heels on she was as tall as he — the tender uses she sometimes made of him, were torment. A fool for her. Divinely fair. Season after season he'd returned to the bush hoping to cure himself of her, and well he knew it was hopeless. While she lived he would be her dog. From the staggering, dazzled day when he first kissed her, he had been overwhelmed.

He called to the kitchen, "Finished," lit a cigarette and went out.

A horse's steps sounded up the trail. In the clear darkness, Elogio Gavarrete rode towards him.

"*Amigo, ¿que tal?*"

"*Bien. ¿Y Ud, don Luís?*"

"*Muy bien, gracias.*"

The younger man dismounted and they shook hands.

"Come in."

"Thanks. I just wanted the receipt for that cable. Your lady wife made the voyage without news?"

"Yes. She will reach Santa Ana Thursday. I leave to meet her day after tomorrow."

"I am made happy. It is lonely for you here."

Lewis lit the lamp and signed his name. "Here is the receipt. Have you dined? Sit down."

"Thank you, I had some little beans at La Loma, and I must return to Platanal immediately." Elogio grinned, white teeth in a wide mouth. "A young man's business."

Lewis' smile stiffened on his face. Elogio was of good height, handsome enough, with the free manner of a vaquero. A strong man, full of juice — that was the feeling he gave, full of juice. He remembered, as he had not for months, that his own Adam's apple was too large, his neck thin, and his glasses and the receding hair above his forehead made him look all brains and no face.

A little of the awkwardness he felt when he talked with some oaf from the Varsity came upon him.

Elogio was telling a bit of scandal from La Loma. He responded mechanically. This youth respected him, they all did, since years past. If you asked them, they would say that to try to fool with Don Luís' wife would be dangerous folly. But that wife would be here in short order, and to these primitive people a man with horns. . . Nor could a young vaquero resist her. I shall never be able to come back.

Elogio accepted a brandy and departed. Lewis called for another beer, arranged his notebooks by the lamp, and sat down to the evening routine. Almost pathetically he pointed out to himself as he copied the day's rough notes, the skill, the insight, and long experience which informed his work. This terse, exact record carried its background of hardships, sickness,

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the maintenance of the keen mind through the difficulties of the tropics, the handling of men, as his colleagues would know. Thought, knowledge, speculative brilliance went into some deductions. This was all real, all strong. Elogio, smelling of sweat and the saddle, his dark skin. Phoebe's whiteness.

There is no divorce. She has my soul in her pocket. A fool for her. Divorce is absence and absence does no good. Not while those hands exist. If only she were never kind to me. Not while there is a man to embrace her. If I could kill all young, strong men. . . "Push her over a cliff."

Abnormal — Bill was tactful.

Between Comalpa and Tuxtepec on the road in from Santa Ana, is the crossing of the Rio Bravo. A string of boulders, making a rapids, enables people to get over on foot. Horses must swim downstream, guided and helped by lariats. It is an exciting operation at best. The full, confined river tears at one's legs, clutches; below, it swirls, leaps, all deep, swift water to the fifty-foot Salto del Lagarto. If a person slips there —

Big trees overhang either bank, a wall of them. A short distance upstream is a backwater where animals come to drink; he got a jaguar there once, and several times deer and wild pig. Elogio went with him when the boy was just turned sixteen, excited at using Lewis' breech-loader.

Then she would not exist. My country would not be soiled; there would still be a place for me. I could own myself again; stop hating the big undergraduates.

Juan Vigil went over two years ago, and Eufemia Garrido the first season I was here. Marcos and I would take the horses across first, then I'd go back to get her.

Impossible, I'm mad. He took up his pen, wiped the sweat off his glasses, and returned to work. The day's record was perfected, but his pleasure in it failed him. It was barren. Everything was barren. Elogio smiled in the lamp-light. Full of juice. He concentrated with an effort, lost himself in the intricate detail of a cross-section which was bringing out vital stratification.

As he recorded on the chart the locations of his finds, the sequences, their possible meaning appeared. His mind raced, fitting evidence together. Sturnheimer says . . .

Done. He pushed it from him with a sigh, finished his beer, flat and warm now. He rose, lighting a cigarette. It's murder, of course, but she can't be allowed to live. Very simple. I wonder if Bill will guess.

He stripped, washed, put on pajamas, and climbed into his hammock. His cigarette made a dull glow when he pulled at it. Since he knew she was coming, he had lain long awake each night, worrying, desiring. He threw the butt onto the dirt floor. He felt excited, but also satisfied, released. It was solved. He hitched his blanket up, settled himself. Drowsiness of a hard day's work overcame the excitement. . . .

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Did you ever make believe you were the detective in a real-life murder case? Or, vicariously, did you ever pretend, while reading a mystery story, that you are the detective in the story?

In a way, that is precisely what Viola Brothers Shore has done in "Everybody's Name Is Jones." She has invited you, the reader, to identify yourself with the narrator in the story — Katy Levin; she asks — it is only an implied request, remember — that you become, symbolically, a person named Jones (or Smith or Brown or any name you wish), and by feeling a sincere responsibility for others, that you seek the truth. And isn't this sense of responsibility for others the real price of democracy, the only true road to peace on earth, good will-toward man?

And what happens when you set out to find the truth? — in a murder case as well as in life? At first, everything is confused, everything is muddy. You don't see your way clearly. Everything is mixed up. That is exactly how you will feel as you read the beginning of this story. You will be as bewildered and befuddled as if you were investigating a case in real life. But as you continue reading, the confusion will slowly resolve, the muddiness will slowly clarify, the mixed-upness will slowly unmix — just as it would in real life, as new facts emerge, as old facts begin to reveal their true meanings, and as the new and old facts interlock. Slowly the jigsaw will begin to form a picture. And by the time you have finished reading the story, the picture will be complete and clear, and you will have traveled, as if you were a real-life detective, the journey from darkness to light, from confusion to comprehension . . .

EVERYBODY'S NAME IS JONES

by VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'LL PUT on my tombstone when and if, but right now they could have been carving, *Here lies Kate Levin — her name was not Jones.* And for anybody that don't remember the Jones yarn, it's about a character sitting in a barber chair and somebody yells, "Jones's barn is on fire!" and he jumps up and starts running till it suddenly hits him, "What am I running for? My name's not Jones."

Well, that's me and that's my motto, up till the night of the big snow. It's getting near to closing and Pop Kulic and me have *The Hamburger Hut* to ourselves, except for old Rubberface Scudder reading a

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New York paper that's two weeks old. After being in the headlines all month, we're three ghosts in a cemetery that the ghouls picked clean. And I'm not even enjoying the luxury of a cup of hot coffee while it's hot because of mentally walking to my furnished room and a couple of hands reaching out from behind a tree —

So when the door flies open I jump. But only a middle-aged Sealskin blows off the bus. The whole air changes, there's something human about her. "Go finish your coffee while it's hot," she says, shaking snow out of her hair which by now is something between a feather boa and steel wool.

"Oh, that's all right." I got to be nineteen without people worrying about my coffee. "I can pour another cup."

"Make it two with Danish." The way your grandma used to say, *Two braids, Missy, and no nonsense about curls.* "I'm being picked up here by my youngest granddaughter. Of course a perfect grandmother has no pets, but who's perfect?"

"How many you got?" Not giving a hoot, just making talk to shake the hands off my neck.

"I never really counted. I collect them instead of Pineapple Glass. I'm Mrs. Fayga Bendovid, in case you could use a Size 40, guaranteed not to shrink or run."

She has big cheekbones and a big mouth, only on her it's becoming. But I'm not in the market for any more adopted relations. Not this year. Just the same, any company is better than Pop Kulic rubbing the chromium off the fixtures and Rubberface Scudder measuring you for a cemetery plot. I pour two cups and sit down. Maybe I'll even bum a lift —

"Ah —!" one coffee-sister to another. "Ah. I remember this coffee. And you too, with those fine fat braids. I was in here around Halloween with the same granddaughter. You must know her, Steffie Daniels?"

I do a quick freeze because Daniels is the County Attorney and I should of known nobody wants me for my raven tresses or my big brown eyes. Not these days. I'm just the girl that worked alongside of the girl they found in back of an automobile. "Look," I say to this Character-In-Search-of-a-Granddaughter, "I told everything I remember to the Chief *and* the Sheriff *and* all their Deputy-Shamuses. *And* your Mr. Daniels. So anything you want to know about Alma Taylor, you'll have to ask him."

"I will," she says, dunking. "You're Katy Kulic?"

"No, Ma'am." I can feel persimmons in my mouth. "Everybody calls me Kulic's Katy but — my name is Levin. Not Kulic and not Jones!"

"Aha." Like she just caught up the answer to something, "Maybe you know the sequel to the Jones story?" I didn't know there was any. "Sure. To every story. After they put out Jones's fire, the whole town went to sleep, so the fire sneaked up again. And a stiff breeze blew sparks on this

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fellow's house and it burned down with him asleep inside. So maybe you better remember a little more."

I've got persimmons down to my stomach. "Who said I know any more?"

"A smart girl always knows more than she tells and people generally telegraph their reservations. Now me, I'm frankly a Jones. And when my grandchild writes that at Hoytstown High they talk nothing but this murder of a waitress, I think those kids should be detecting conjugations and debating *What Is Academic Freedom* instead of *What Was the Motive — Jealous Love or Thwarted Sex?* — as if those are the only two manias in the world. Of course, the others don't sell so many newspapers!" She jabs a dunk. "The busman says this whole community is split in two."

Well, sure, when two local boys are hauled in and it's got to be one of them. I let her have it straight. "Cyril Weddle has the New York-Philly crowd, being Old Philadelphia Cream Cheese. But the Kulic boys grew up around here and took their turns flipping Burgerbuns, so all the farmers and other plain Petes don't like Bud Kulic being locked up as a 'Material Witness' while Weddle can strut around 'In the custody of his counsel.' Pfui! And you can tell Mr. Daniels, comes re-election, there's more of us than he thinks!"

"Oh, by that time —" She gets out her cigarettes but me, I'm smoking inside. "My son-in-law doesn't handle cases to win votes, but strictly according to his lights. They could be stronger, maybe, for this particular jigsaw puzzle, but if people hold pieces in their laps —" I see Rubberface Scudder listening and I pick up my cup. She whispers, "Sit still. I wouldn't say anything he couldn't figure out himself. Who is he anyway?"

"He's a character that used to sit at Alma's tables and now he sits at mine. Sells shares in a Burial Society."

She talks lower. "Listen, Katy, the truth can't hurt. Bud Kulic if he's innocent. If — And when the puzzle's all put together what looks like a cloud turns out to be a puppy's nose. In life everything's interconnected, everything leads to something else. And one murder leads to another if you let the murderer walk the streets."

"In the custody of his counsel!" I remind her.

"Or maybe we're pushing the background in the middle? The middle is a motive and a face. Two faces with two motives is too much, and where there is too much, something is missing. Was Alma Taylor such a beauty with only Sex in her life?" Alma was blonde and cow-pretty and about as hot as arithmetic. "So let's look for some interconnection between her life and her death. Because *if* somebody had to get rid of her, he might begin thinking about some other somebody who might be holding the connecting piece —"

I'm back to two hands. Mine are

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like ice and she covers them. "I'm not trying to scare you, Katy. Only believe me, everybody's name is Jones."

I don't know if it's her voice or her eyes, but I'm a bottle and somebody's pulling out the cork —

A lock clicks and Pop starts downing lights and I snap back, "Talk to Mr. Daniels."

"Why do you think I come down here on such a night? For the bus ride? Believe me, we have excellent Danish pastry in New York."

"But the coffee —" I shake out her sealskin. "And your granddaughter."

"Aiee . . ." she starts fishing for a nickel.

"Excuse me," says Rubberface Scudder, handing her his card. "My jalopy is outside."

She looks him over. "Well, Mr. Scudder, you couldn't sell Katy or me a cemetery plot, but if you want to be so kind —"

"I'd be happy to drop you, and Miss Katy too."

It's no night for walking. Or riding either, we find out, crawling the last mile to the Daniels' house. Mrs. Bendovid piles out and all of a sudden I wish I'd walked.

"Come on, Katy, you're staying here." I don't need any sales talk, because at least I'm sure what she's selling.

Scudder slams his door but by that time the Daniels door is open and a bear hug is going on that's strictly for the Joneses. "Why so late? And why didn't you phone?"

"Why — why — Because three heads are better than two and this is Katy Levin who needs to thaw out. Her room is like an icebox." I don't know where she got that. "Who can afford a fireplace on tips?"

"You'll get used to her," Steffie says to me, and we start upstairs. "I've got a fire in the guest room."

"It's not too much trouble?"

"Oh, poof." She's a cute kid with saddlebrown hair and serious squirrel-color eyes. "Tante Fayga never makes trouble. Except for Father." So then we seem to understand each other and I don't need an R.S.V.P. to dunk in a hot tub with nobody listening to how long you let it run.

When it's off, I can hear Steffie in the next room. "It's on his desk now, and my clue is in the deep-freeze if you want to look —"

"You wrote to me that it's a frozen hamburger. What's to look?"

"But the stain on the paper bag the hamburger was in! A reddish stain!"

"So if it isn't ketchup, the report'll say so." This is a new one on me. Nobody ever mentioned finding any frozen hamburger.

"I picked it up in my scarf the day we all combed Willow Wood for the weapon. But Father stuck it in the freezer and just sent the bag to the Lab because he's so thorough. I *did* want to show up Mr. Bing Bang Bingham."

"That's Sheriff Bingham?"

"His nephew. He's just a Deputy that had the luck to find the kidnaped Brandeau baby. And that great

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achievement got our hero his badge and a new Buick from the Brandeaus and an idea that nobody can dig up a clue but J. Edgar Bingham. I can't stand him!"

Which is like me saying, Who wants a sulky counterman that don't know what he wants only this isn't it; Bing at least knows what he's after and to Seventeen his six-feet-one must be an eyeful with his special Deputy's belt and gloves — "I swear," she keeps on, "he's got J. Edgar's picture in his watch! Not that a girl would be found there dead — a moron that gets you on a dance floor to hear about all the Bingham Badges, and *he's* going to be the star on top of the family tree! Poof! Every clue he brings in just muddles this case more. We once *solved* a case and I knew if I could get you down here —"

"It's nice of you to think of poor Tante Fayga stuck home with only a job and nine meetings," she's saying when I come in. Her hair is pinned up in little anchovies and Steffie is curled in a blue quilt with one twin bed groaning under the both. "I'm no Lady Wimsical but if a little common sense will help —"

"Let's go," Steffie says and opens a brief-case. "Father keeps a duplicate file in the safe because of things missing from the office and I worked like a fool arranging this junk because I knew you'd say, 'Facts — Interconnections — and don't put the foreground in the middle.' "

"Grandchildren you need!" says Mrs. Bendovid and hands her a page.

"Not chronologically?"

"Your father starts with the crime and works back? Well, I respect professional experience and training."

"Yatatayatata," says Steffie, and begins to read her notes:

On February 1st John (known as Stutterbug) Stacey burst into the Sheriff's house on Willow Lane, a dead end with no other houses.

Stacey: C-come out and look at my c-car!

Sheriff: Been looking at it since the Bazaar, wondering when it would thaw out. Sprain your foot?

Stacey: I was l-laid up and — C-come on!

Sheriff: I'm no tow-car. What's eating you anyway? Look like you'd seen a corpse.

Stacey: I d-did! In the t-trunk compartment! *Sheriff Bingham found the body of a girl jammed into the compartment, a blood-soaked brown coat wrapped around her head, which had been battered beyond recognition. There was no purse or other means of identification.*

Deputy J. E. Bingham: The Taylor girl had on a brown dress at the Bazaar! I told you she was missing!

Sheriff: I thought you were just playing G-man.

"His own Uncle!" Steffie crows. "Want the questioning of Stutterbug?"

"Not if it has to be stuttered. They checked his story?"

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"But definitely. We Hoytonians all went in one bus and saw him park there, and we drove him home from the Bazaar with a sprained foot. So, while everybody was Bazaaring, somebody found a perfect place to dispose of a body."

"A perfect place to dispose of a girl, because nobody *brings* a body into the Sheriff's front yard to hide. If there was no blood, the coat could have absorbed it."

"But definitely. Father reasons the murderer could have (a) left the body in sight; (b) buried it in frozen ground, using time he couldn't account for; and (c) expected the car to be driven away."

"Your father is a good reasoner," quells his mother-in-law, "and we can unmuddle all those dark swarthy foreigners seen by Mrs. A. J. Tackaberry of York Road. Take a paper, Katy, and write down *INTERCONNECTIONS*. First, Between Murderer and Locality. Go on."

Coroner Garrity couldn't say what caused the head fractures, but something flat and heavy like a rock.

"Not a tack-hammer," I point out, "just because they found one in the Kulic ash heap!"

"The Lab report's on Father's desk. But there wasn't a stone we didn't turn over."

"So where did it go? Does somebody carry away a rock that's more anonymous just lying there? Mark down Interconnection 2: Between Weapon and Murderer. Next? What's next?"

On attempting to identify the body, Kulic, Sr., fainted. Bud Kulic refused to cooperate but Mrs. Kulic mentioned a ripped hem in Alma's brown dress held up by a safety-pin, a jagged birthmark shaped like a 7 and an enlarged bunion joint.

"And nothing good?" She's no fool that Mrs. B. "Even the Coroner mentions at least the girl was a virgin."

"'No evidence of criminal attack,'" Miss Daniels reads from *her* report of the Coroner's final report.

Alma Taylor had eaten ground beef and mustard pickle prior to death, which resulted from strangulation before the fractures of the head, shoulder, and fourth finger —

"And how anybody could imagine Cyril Weddle smashing her finger for a cheap topaz-and-silver ring —"

"It belonged to the Borgias —" It's out before I think and Steffie snaps it up. "You testified that Alma said she found it." Well, she did.

"With a card from the Borgias?"

"Once in the john she showed me how the stone lifts and she said, that's where the Borgias kept poison." ("And you know who I'd like to use it on! I'm supposed to say I found it because some G.I. swiped it out of a museum in Florence, Italy" — But that can't do Bud any good.)

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"All right, Interconnection 3: Murderer and Ring — because we don't have here a plain robbery."

"Definitely not! Her purse turned up in a dressing room after the Bazaar with money and the usual junk and one thing that isn't generally known — an old tattered travel-folder with some faint numbering. The Lab brought up PO 713-or-8, and that's Police Chief Petrie's home phone — Pontiac 718, so maybe —"

"So maybe we put down PO 713-or-8 and see what's in the picture we've got."

I'd like to go to sleep once without seeing that picture, which is only another case to the County Attorney's daughter. Steffie says, "Alma Taylor was murdered some time after leaving the Bazaar and before midnight, when the Sheriff's household returned to Willow Lane, by someone close enough (a) to expect a spotlight on his whereabouts; (b) to smash her face to delay identification or because he hated her; (c) with a weapon that could be traced to him; and (d) taking her silver ring ditto. Okay?"

"A Daniels come to Judgment!"

"Oh, poof. By the way, Father got a long-distance call about the ring and that's where he is now. Maybe if — if —"

"If Grandma had wheels she would be a wagon. So now we work back. What happened, Katy, when Alma was first missed?"

"We thought she got fed up with Hoytstown —" (Watch it, Katy, no slips about that fight in the dressing room.) "Somebody said she was taking a trip around the world and —"

"Who? Who told who?"

"Mom Kulic told Bing — that's young Bingham. And he said, Funny she didn't mention it Sunday, and Pop asked was he trying to make himself a new case, and why didn't he find whoever hid little Billy Brandeau in the Old Mill? Everybody knows waitresses have itching feet —" Didn't I, before the Kulics got their family arms around me?

"But, Katy, *somebody knew* where Alma was. Somebody showed a special interest?"

"Cyril Weddle. He seemed very upset."

"Naturally. I suppose Bud Kulic was upset too?"

"I wasn't noticing him particularly." (Not since the day I ran over to borrow Mom's sleeve iron, because she has every kind of pressing gadget, and Bud was shooting off about everything being handed down to him. The others could hand it down to the next, but he's stuck the rest of his life flipping Burgerbuns '— because Mom wants her whole family settled around her with somebody Mom picks out! Well, if she'll just hand down my bank account, I'll pick my own —' I didn't press my sleeves for Em Kulic's wedding and who cared. Bud walked into the Church with Alma.) "Scudder showed a special interest in Alma going off without her clothes, but Mom said maybe somebody promised her new ones. Everybody thought Scudder

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had a yen for Alma himself, he was always trying to date her. And so was Cyril."

Steffie sits up. "Wait! If he had a Freudian fixation —"

"If. If. If he had wheels he would be a taxi with both doors open. Write down Scudder and forget Cyril."

"*Why?* He lied about driving her from the Bazaar! And about the gouge over his eye. *And* about his glove (which you didn't mention being found under Alma!). Then when Bing found the mate and had a *perfect case* against him, his Mama brought in a lawyer and he got away with the world's prize fish story!"

"Maybe we could find some fish in it. You've got Cyril's statement?"

Around 10:15 Alma came up to me at the Buffet, very upset and said, "Take me out of here!" so I had them wrap up my Supercargo — that's a Doubledecker with chow-chow. Kulic's stuff is all Dittybags and Y-Bombs and stuff Bud picked up in the Merchant Marine.

I thought a car was following us and pulled up to see who passed. But instead a small dark coupe swung into Willow Lane. I backed in and saw an empty crate down by the fence —

Question: You didn't feel the motor?

No, we figured it was somebody cutting across the woods. We ate the Supercargo and I asked why she was so steamed up and she said, "You'd be steamed up too if you were counting on something and all you got was a piece of tin and a lot of promises! Keep it quiet! How long — till I'm gray?"

I asked if Bud was scared of his mother and she said, "She's got them all buffaloed. Ever notice her hands? They got so big from keeping them around everybody's bank account. Over $2000 he earned himself! I told him what to do."

So we talked about families having big money for rewards and stuff but if a fellow needs a new car, oh, no! that's for G-men that don't even find the kidnaper. She kept getting more and more worked up but when I tried to pet her down, she got sore. I grabbed her and she smacked me and ran up Willow Lane. So I started up the crate.

Question: But you didn't pass her?

No, I figured she got another hitch. But then I got worried about the wrong kind of hitch and stuff and I wasn't very proud of my part.

"H'm. Quite a kettleful, including red herrings. But maybe this kidnaping might have an intercon —?"

"I'll say! Mrs. Brandeau is Cyril's aunt and if he saw a way to raise money —"

"If. If knisches you want, everywhere you see knisches. If I remember, after the alarm went out, one Deputy phoned in he was on the trail of a small, dark coupe. A small dark coupe followed Cyril and could have

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been waiting behind the Sheriff's house —"

"And whoever was in it caught Alma and picked up Cyril's glove!"

"Not Bud!" I said. "Mom found him asleep at 10:30. The Cream Cheese crowd say a mother'd alibi her son, but wouldn't your father's trained seals break a phony alibi?" I'm selling it to myself too. "Can't a guy have a headache and go home? And if your mother threatens to brain deputies with an ironing board, they'll find *some* hammer in your ash heap!"

"Especially the Sheriff's little Busy Beavers. If Bud had just cooperated, Father wouldn't have felt he was holding something back and that he'd soften up —"

"Like cement! And poor Pop's a changed man and *Mom* —!" From a big round apple to a scarecrow with two holes burned in for eyes!

"So stop being Katy Superjones and turn up the pieces in your lap and don't say What pieces, if I knew I wouldn't ask! When was the last you saw Alma?"

Here it comes. "I relieved her at 10."

"She took her purse?" (Wait a minute — purse — numbers — Alma and her lucky numbers —) "Fifteen minutes later she was so upset she left it in a dressing room. Where she had a fight?"

But if Bud didn't kill her —? And this Interconnection's beginning to get me. Anyway, the cork's out. "Mom wanted to know if Bud really went home and I couldn't find him, but I heard Alma's voice coming out of a dressing room. It sounded like, 'How many numbers do you want?' "

Mrs. Bendovid's eyes are looking right through me. "What else, Katy? What else did you hear?"

It still burns my tongue coming out. "Alma said, 'You don't scare me, you don't dare lay a hand on me! I know what I've got and I'm through playing tiddlediwinks!' "

"And you thought it could only mean one thing! A woman has only one meaning, one ambition, one mainspring, the same key unlocks us all! Do *we* have to believe that too? What made Alma tick? Why did she leave the farm? What did she want? Why did the Kulics say she was going around the world?"

"Because that's what she wanted!" Of course! Saying Jerusalem, Egypt, Damascus, her eyes lit up.

Steffie is riffling through papers. "Her sister said Alma never cared about boys — here it is — 'When she told me her lucky number came in, I thought she won the money to go and see all those places with faraway names —' "

"So there it was all the time — the key to Alma Taylor. In Hoytstown she took a job. So she didn't have the money, but she expected to get it. She was 'counting on something and getting a lot of promises.' From whom? 'I know what I've got' — What? Come on, Katy, what?"

"Oh, damn! Wouldn't you *know* —?" Steffie kicks off the quilt

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and goes to answer the phone. "Don't say a word till I get back!"

"Who was threatening her? Somebody that's been around all the time because she was through playing tiddlediwinks. Forget about Bud. He was home in bed. Who used to talk to her around *The Hamburger Hut?*"

How can I remember? A waitress talks to everybody. Scudder? She wouldn't expect money from an undertaker with an old jalopy. Money. Money for the trip —

Steffie calls up, "Tante Fayga, Father's stuck out at Burke's Crossing and wants to talk to you."

Mrs. Bendovid starts out, pulling the bathrobe around her. "What did she have that was worth money? What was her lucky number — Seven? Think, Katy —"

Think. "My lucky number even takes the hex off 13" — 13 and 7 on the travel folder but where do we go —? "You wouldn't know your luck if you saw it, Alma Taylor." "Oh, no? I'd see a fortune other people would pass by." A fortune — "It doesn't take a fortune to see the world. You could do it for $2500 —" But that's what Bud had in the trust account, nearly —

Forget about Bud. But I can't. A Bud that was never really in love with Alma, but just wanted to get away from anybody Mom kept shoving down his throat. Poor Mom, she meant well — "Katy, it's lonely with all the girls gone. You could have Em's room. He'll come to his senses now. A boy needs his money to build a house." To build a house — imagine — your own house — "I helped Pop build this house with these two hands" —.

Oh, no. *NO!* No, that's crazy. Think, Katy. Somebody that's been there all the time. That followed her from the Bazaar and hated her enough to . . .

With a flat heavy object.

But you wouldn't have it in your car!

If you'd been pressing stuff for the Bazaar?

Dear God, *NO!*

I hear them coming and I'm out like a light. On my face, so you couldn't tell. I hear them whispering, "Tomorrow —"

I won't be here tomorrow. Don't worry, Mrs. B., the murderer isn't laying for me. She likes me. She wanted me for a daughter. . . .

Long after I hear her breathing, I'm still seeing pieces. Not Mom alibiing Bud, but the other way, and that's why *he* wouldn't talk. Once you begin to see . . . Other people are paid to see. It's not up to me to help them. Or Bud. He wouldn't want that kind of help. . . .

But the pieces keep spinning around. Around and around and when I grab them they melt in my hand. A piece with numbers — a ticket around the world — it's pasted across my face and I can't breathe — it's over my nose but my nose is rubber, a puppy's nose, and a man without a face is putting a leash around my neck, and when I break away two

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hands grab me and throw me in a crate, a narrow crate, it's a coffin and I'm jammed in and it's on fire — *let me out* —

It's not daylight yet, but I had enough. I sneak on my clothes and tiptoe downstairs. Some way I'll get a hitch into town and out of town tonight. I'm feeling for the front door when it begins to open —

But it's day now, even if it isn't light, and Mr. Daniels is very human. He knows I'm there, because they told him. "They're a formidable team, Katy, and I'm not up to facing them. So let's pick up what's on my desk and sneak off for a cup of coffee —"

And I'm a so-and-so if I couldn't kiss the County Attorney!

The longest day ends some time. I ought to know, I lived through it. The day the big freeze breaks and the big snow slushes and every pair of galoshes might bring in a sealskin. . . . But finally it's closing time and Mom Kulic says, "Come home with us, Katy," but I'm not sleeping anywhere in Hoytstown. I'm leaving everything shipshape so they'll only say, "Waitresses! They all got itching feet." Then Scudder's driving me to some burg where I don't know anybody's barn to get on fire — Jones's or anybody else's.

The door opens and I think it's Scudder, and it's the Sealskin! She's sorry to be so late, she only wants a cup of coffee, her granddaughter's picking her up. Like a nightmare you know you have dreamed before.

I hear Mom say to Mrs. Bendovid, "White streaks in our Burgers? You mean *fat*?" — and I want to warn her not to say any more, not even what's in a Burger, but while I'm catching Mom's eye she calls out, "Pop! Pop!" — and crumbles in a chair.

"I'm afraid I gave her a shock, telling her your boy will be home," the Sealskin says to Pop. Poor Mom. And poor little pint-size Pop, so crazy about her and his family. Tears are running down his face. I can't take any more. I want to scream, Go home! Leave them alone!

The door goes again and it's Steffie, all lit up with Neons because she's got Deputy Bingham in tow. "I've been telling him about Father's new lead and he's telling me all about Supercargoes and Dittybags and —" I give up. I guess I was never seventeen.

"What'll you have? On the house!" Pop's like a crazy man, laughing and crying.

"Order for me, Bing, whatever you take." Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, and Bing's Y-Bomb will blast out her tonsils, but maybe it's worth it for love. I give him a tip on his way to the john. "Look, One-Track, no girl wants to hear about all the silver stars on your family tree and how you trailed a coupe to Burke's Crossing."

"But she asked me! Because her father's crew let the trail slip through their fingers. She thinks the C.A.'s office and the Sheriff's ought to work

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much closer together." Go argue with G-meningitis. And anyway, Rubberface Scudder is there, kind of pathetic, like somebody's finally buying a cemetery share. "You ready, Miss Katy?"

"You can't take Katy," says Mrs. Bendovid, like she's been elected America's Grandma. "Sit down, Mr. Scudder. I think you'll be interested in my theory about Myths, Monomania, and Murder."

Scudder sits down. He looks around like he don't know where to look. "What's this theory about —"

"Oh, how one leads to another. I was in Philadelphia today talking to your relatives, the Brandeaus —" Which is news to me! "They feel the police bungled the kidnaping of the Brandeau child."

"Such a terrible experience," Mom says. "People without children don't know!"

"To torture a Mother's heart is worse than murder!" Pop bangs down the assorted Burgers. "A mother-torturer has no right to live! And if the Law is blind —"

"We never stop looking," says Deputy Bingham the Law, back from the john. "Even when the trail gets cold, we always turn up something new —" and he swaps looks with Steffie.

A crazy hope stabs up in me. County Attorney Daniels! Three amachoors making with Interconnections but Daniels is a trained man and he — "Wait!" It busts out of me. "I've got it!"

"What?"

"The Interconnection! Alma got here the first week in November and the kidnaping —" That's backwards — "I mean Alma said, 'You wonder how St. Peter's looks, compared to the Meeting House in *Burke's Crossing*.' Don't you see? In *Burke's Crossing!* That's where Mr. Daniels was and that's where you found little Billy Brandeau! And Halloween was a Sunday —"

"Wait a minute." Bing is very Deputy-Sheriff now. "If you've got any evidence —"

"Let her talk while she's pro-Jones," says Gen. Bendovid.

But I don't know where to begin. "Nobody knew where Alma expected to get the money to travel —"

"From Bud's bank account! That she-devil told him to go to Law against his own Mother!" Pop says the word like it's holy.

"You got the wrong picture! Alma was just a farm kid with a tick to see the places in the Bible, and Bud *ought* to get away! If Mom could learn to let him pick his own life —"

Pop don't like that, but Steffie wants to know, "Where *was* Alma going to get the money?"

"From the kidnaping reward! That's the $2500 she was after!"

"Look here. This is very important." Bing is very important, too. Because I don't really *know* —

"Take your hands off her! If Miss Katy wants to see the Sheriff, we'll stop off there!" says Rubberface.

It looks like they're going to fight

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over me, and it's going to be too bad for Scudder. "We'll drive her," Pop says. "Katy's coming home with us."

But I don't know. I don't know what'll happen after the Sheriff. Only whatever it is, I wish it was over. Because I'm scared. Scared of Willow Lane — as if I know I'll never come back.

"Katy's not going anywhere," says Mrs. Bendovid. "There's been enough muddling on this case. Too much. If the Sheriff wants her, let him send a warrant."

That's hitting Bing where he's touchy. "I'm an officer of the Law —"

"And the Law is older than you and your new special gloves and belt and badge, and there's no such thing as enforcement that's bigger than the due process, and it's time all you little tin stars found that out!"

Boy! She's got a temper too! Steffie looks scared to death and I see Bing's fist close and if she wasn't an old lady, he'd of let her have it. You can see him holding himself in. "Nobody's got to teach us Binghams our job! Come on, Katy! This is a murder case and any vital testimony goes to the Sheriff!"

Or the County Attorney! Because that's my boy, Daniels, always opening the right door at the right minute. Steffie calls out, "Just in time, Father!" — and I'd like to kiss him.

"You said you wanted a lift home." He looks exactly like you think a County Attorney looks.

"I couldn't get you here any other way, and I promised Bing —"

Bing drops his gloves back on the table. "Was it the right ring, Mr. Daniels?"

Daniels' jaw gets even squarer. "What ring?"

But Steffie's not scared of *him*. "You always say there's no rivalry with the Sheriff's office, so I told Bing (a) you had a call from the State Police; (b) you took along the drawing of the ring; and (c) you said, 'Go to sleep, it's in the bag.' Of course, if you didn't get the murderer —"

"I didn't. Put on your coat!"

"Then our Bud isn't coming home?" Poor Mom Kulic.

"Who said —?"

"Me," says Mrs. B. "You won't want him when you have the real murderer. Well, between us we have all the pieces. If you don't want to talk about the ring, sit down and listen. You too, Mr. Scudder. You wanted to know about Monomania and Murder?"

"This is no way, Mr. Daniels! My Uncle —"

"Take it easy, fella, you'll last longer. Your Uncle's out in Burke's Crossing. And if there's any glory coming, you earned your share." Daniels looks around the table. "We'll send your boy home tomorrow. If he had been willing to cooperate —"

"When people do, you don't take any interest in what they find," says Steffie.

Daniels is a Great Dane being nagged by a Pom. "Okay, baby. The Lab found blood on your paper bag,

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but not enough to type. You told Bing about your Big Clue?"

But she doesn't bat an eye. "Oh, it was nothing — just some Hamburgers I found in Willow Wood."

"*Hamb* —!" Bing is a thunderstorm going somewhere to break. "That's why you were pumping me!"

Daniels grins. "Some day I'll tell you what they did to me on the Meyer case. All right, let's put the cards on the table. A State Trooper saw an antique topaz ring on a girl's finger and when we get the truth out of her —" He looks tired but kind of pleased with life.

Bing decides to sit in. "You saw the ring? Was it Alma's?"

"No initials, but I'd bet —"

"Save your money," Mrs. B. advises.

He puts his hand in his pocket. "You knew the ring, Katy?"

My eyes pop out. "Alma's ring! There couldn't be two!"

"Why not?" Bendovid again.

"I'd swear that's the ring Alma used to wear!" Bing is all hot now, except one cold shoulder to Miss Daniels. "Where'd she say she got it?"

"If she'd say, we'd have this case sewed up. She swears she bought it."

Mrs. B. digs in her bag. "From an ex-G.I. that stole it out of the Borgia Museum for his wife who since walked out, and he wants to forget about her."

Daniels don't look pleased with anything any more. My trump-card Daniels — so I says, "But that *proves* it's Alma's! Because that's what she told me about the Borgias —"

"Those Borgias," says Mrs. B. "How they ever had time to wear all the genuine antique Borgia rings, let alone the fingers!" She brings something out of her bag. "Which would you swear Alma used to wear?"

Daniels picks up his chips and you can see he's used to her. But Bing is gawking at the dead-ringer. "Where did you get that?"

"In Philadelphia. The same ex-G.I. was around there. In fact, they've got him locked up, but it was a good racket while it lasted. Sit still, he'll be there tomorrow if you want to ask him who bought one in Hoytstown."

Bing wants to ask him right now, but Steffie says, "Tomorrow, Bing," and squeezes her father's arm. "I tried to tell you but you never come to the phone."

Daniels is a sport. "Remind me to give you a code word next time. Where you going, Scudder?"

"To get a drink —"

"I'll get a pitcher!" I don't want him leaving that table. I just noticed the bulge under his arm.

Daniels takes a long drink. "Now, let's have it. Straight. Don't go all around Robin's barn."

"How many County Offices have been playing tag around Robinson's barn?"

"Four, Tante Fayga, now the State Police are in —"

"So it's worth a minute to sew it up

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neat? And if women sew neater, it's because we get so much practice. What was the first Interconnection, Katy? Between the Murderer and the Weapon?" That was the second but I'm not holding up the show. "Could I see your gun, son?"

"What?" But Daniels hands it over.

"And yours, Deputy? Just lay it on the table. And Mr. Scudder? The one under your arm? Mr. Kulic?" Pop has to get his from behind the counter.

Daniels is impatient. "Look, Tante Fayga —"

"I know the girl wasn't shot. And the monomaniac that smashed her poor face isn't carrying around a weapon that would show blood. *That* he disposed of long ago."

"Well, then —"

"You'll see. First, we go back to Halloween when little Billy Brandeau crawled through the hedge and somebody carried him off to Burke's Crossing. And Alma coming back from church passes the Old Mill —"

"*WAIT!*" Because I've got it this time. "Remember, Mr. Scudder, you asked what men Alma went around with and I told you they needed something better than a jalopy? Because she said to me, Every car in the County is supposed to park here some time — and she kept watching cars — cars — Because that's what she saw at the Old Mill — *a strange car!* And when she heard about the reward, she remembered part of the license. And she came to work here to find a car with numbers beginning P — 0713!"

"That's my Katy!" Mrs. B. pats my hand. "That's the missing piece."

"But that's easy to find out," Daniels says, like he bit a rubber grape. And Scudder says, "All she had to do was ask." And Bing says, "Sure! She could have come to the Sheriff's —"

Mrs. B. drops her napkin over the guns. "But that's what she did, Deputy Bingham. And you thought you could string her along and keep her happy with a ring. And when you found she was as One-Track as you, and her track led right to the car you had before the Brandeaus gave you the Buick, you strangled her and bashed in her head with one of these —" And she holds up Bing's new left glove that has the metal strip inside.

For a minute everybody's frozen. It's the grab for the glove that gives him away. I guess it was instinct, but Daniels is pretty instinctive too, and the poor old amachoor Family Sleuth is right in there pitching, and the guns are still under the napkin. But that Bing is a hellcat and the place is a shambles and they're so mixed up you can't get at him and he's dragging them all to the door. I put out my foot and when they go down, I let fly with what I have in my hand. Once for poor Alma and again for little Billy Brandeau. The third time the ketchup bottle breaks and somebody pulls me away. And Tante Fayga shoves a cup in my hand.

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The men are all outside and I haven't got my breath when Steffie says, "I never *could* stand him."

She sure put on a good show. "When did you guess?"

"Oh, the minute we got those Y-Bombs and saw the horseradish, we knew. Because she broke open the frozen one and it was full of white streaks. But it took Tante Fayga to do anything as common-sensible as breaking a case by breaking open a Hamburger."

"After going around Robinson Crusoe's barn," says Mrs. B. "Without hamburger and without gloves, he was the only interconnection with all the other pieces — the complete cases he dug up on those boys — the dark coupe he reported that all my son-in-law's men couldn't uncover —"

"Even the papers missing from Father's office. If I'd only *thought* —"

"If. If. If hindsight was foresight, who would need grandmothers? Come along, Katy, you're a very material witness."

I'm just beginning to get the whole picture. Crazy one-track Bing that had to win his badge *some* way, and who ever looks at what ticks in back of one? If I'd gone with him — "*Believe me*," — and I'll burn in anybody's barn if I don't mean it — "from now on my name is Jones!"

"Kulic is better." Good old Mom. Some people never learn. Just the same I try it — Katy Kulic. If —

If. If. If Grandma had wheels — I'll take her just the way she is.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Walter E. Chaulk's "Like an Apple" is one of the seven "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. It is what might be called a hillbilly-regional-dialect yarn, introducing an authentic Sherlock of the Hills, Sheriff Glass — about whom we hope to hear more in the future; and you will find that the author, as well as his characters, "has got the hills writ in his mind and cut in his heart, with the song of the wind in the pines in his blood." It's a fresh, earthy, exhilarating sensation . . .

Mr. Chaulk is now in his early thirties, married, and the New Britain manager of an industrial plant food-service. He helped pay his way through Boston University by working in a restaurant, cooking pot roasts. (He once wrote a story in which a corpse was hung among salamis and cheeses, but for rather obvious reasons it didn't sell!) During World War II, Mr. Chaulk was a member of the 17th Airborne, in Europe; he got out with a whole skin, and is now working on a novel dealing with the problems he faced before, during, and after the war.

"Like an Apple" burst out of Mr. Chaulk's subconscious with, as he says, no studied forethought. He ran it off at one sitting and mailed it to EQMM's annual contest that same night. Betty, his wife and favorite critic, opined it was somewhat of a shock to see her Walter leap from the dinner table, proceed to mangle the typewriter, and then actually come up with a finished story. But, Lord of the Hills, it sold! — and there's no stronger antidote to depression and no sharper spur to expression than a check from a publisher. So, carry on, Walter . . .

LIKE AN APPLE

by WALTER E. CHAULK

MY NAME'S LIGE CHIDDER. DON'T know's it matters one way or th'other, what with me setting here in this old hoosegow looking at the tree outside, where they figure to hang me today about time the sun's atop Old Yoke Pine. Figure you might read about me in the papers and ask how come I was hung, so I'll say how come, so's you'll know. . . .

"Used to be, in these hills, a man could rightly kill any cuss he needed to, like when my Pa killed Eph Calder for stealing Pa's hoss when I was a kid. Seems like, since Sheriff Glass come up from the county seat

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and brung the Law, it ain't right no more and a man's got to go figuring round how to kill a cuss so's he don't get caught and get hisself hung. Like me, it took a heap of figuring how to kill Zack and a heap less for the Sheriff to untie what I thunk.

"Zack's been the power and glory in these hills about Glitchen for many a moon. Before I killed him, he used to own most all the tall timber and the passels of land, all which he got by tricks of the Law. Mostly he lent out the cash and then picked up a man's passel of land or tall timber when things was lean and a man was all broke down of cash. Ain't another cuss — mean's some of 'em be — would press a man for lent cash when he's had lean days.

"Way I figured, Zack was the strongest cuss about here, and the weakest too. Weak, on account he was crazy scared of being in rooms or houses or sheds or such, and had hisself a tree-nest on the edge of Glitchen. He cut off the branches level to the floor, so's he never saw no walls, but only sky by day and night. I recollect how once he was in Ben Eld's office — Ben's the local banker — talking cash he lent Ben to run the bank, and how he got scared of being cooped in Ben's place, bust out hawg wild, and Ben went outside his bank to talk with Zack. Rainy nights Zack stayed in his tree-nest under a tarpaulin, and was even scared of sleeping under that sort of roof.

"First I figure how to kill Zack after Ben was to lend me cash for seed trees, but Zack tells Ben 'no' on account Zack lent me cash last year which I ain't paid back yet and Zack figures to pick up my passel of land and trees in Frog Woods. All I got out there is a shack and a tool shed, but less a man's got cash he can't live on the land and he can't go milk his kin for a living. As it is, I got these hills writ in my mind and cut in my heart, with the song of the wind in the pines in my blood. Now my blood's froze at Zack for making Ben say 'no,' and I can't live away from Frog Woods on account all the land for thirty mile is flat like a pan. You can see the why of my killing Zack; the how comes from where he's crazy scared of rooms and the like.

"It all comes plain to me when me and Eb Beeden's swilling Eb's corn out to his place, and Eb tells me how Zack went loony once when he got shut in a privy and don't get set loose till next day, and how Zack was like he's been lost on the desert for a month, even to losing ten pounds. It all comes clear when I recollect how once I got stuck inside my tool shed on account the wind blowed the door and the lock-bar fell off the peg and snugged, and I was all night digging nails out of a board to get loose.

"Don't see a man's any less for making out easy and friendly when all the time he figures to kill a cuss. So, I tell Zack to come out to my place for the papers, and also to get my Riverside, two-barrel, twelve-gauge gun to make up the rest of what cash I lent from him last year.

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He comes quick, mostly for the gun which I always save for the turkey shoot in Glitchen and is the best gun in the county. I tell him to go get the gun hisself from the shed which sets leftside my shack, and tell him the gun is in a box on the back wall. He's got to step clear inside the shed to get at the gun, and he's bad scared of being stuck in there, so he snugs the peg tight so's the lock-bar don't slip. Then's when I pull the peg and lock down the bar, and I got him sure on account even his two hundred pounds can't break no hickory wood bar, and he ain't smart to pull nails like I done that time.

"All morning I hear him yell crazy, and I wait for the sun to get inside and bake him hot. He says how he'll give me my passel of land free and tries hard to butt the walls with his fat back. Then when the sun's atop Old Yoke Pine and high's she'll ever be, he says give him water. I know from how he sounds that his tongue's burnt hot. I cut out a wood knot in the door about face high, careful so's it'll go back in like it wasn't cut out, and I stick in a tin funnel so's he can drink. He talks big a minute, like I ain't man enough to let him set inside the shed to die of the sun. I just smile. I let water run in the funnel, so's he knows it's water and no fooling. I want him used to drinking from the funnel.

"Most the night he hollers, but nobody comes near my place any time, so I sleep fine. Sunup, he's loco and is scratching the walls. He sets a wad of cash in the knot-hole and says he'll get me more from Glitchen if I loose him, but I know it's a lie and he's figuring to cross me when he's loose. Besides, I don't want no wad of cash when folks hereabouts know I'm broke down. I look inside the knot-hole and never saw a man so far gone, the way he holds bloody fingers to his face, and when he licks his lips but don't wet the cracks in them.

"I tell him he can have more water, and will he sure write down on paper how I can keep my passel of land all free. It's to make him easy so's he don't figure what I got in mind to do. He says sure, and I let him swallow some water and he wants more. I take away the funnel, but stick in the barrel of my single-shot gun. It's like the funnel to him on account he sees only what he wants to see. I let him set his mouth around the funnel, only it's my gun, you see, and I pull the trigger.

"I open the shed and look in, and he's got a hole in back of his head like he stuck my Riverside in his mouth and killed hisself. I shoot off the right-hand barrel of my Riverside into Frog Woods, and lay it on his belly and chest, so's the triggers rest on his row of buttons. I snug his right-hand thumb down on the trigger, so's it's plain he pushed down on the right-hand trigger and for sure killed hisself. I clean my single-shot gun, so's Sheriff Glass don't find no other new-fired gun. I lock the shed and put the knot back in the hole. It looks for sure Zack killed hisself with my Riverside.

"Then I fetch the Sheriff from

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Glitchen and tell him how I been out hunting in Frog Woods all yesterday and last night, and how I come home and find Zack. The Sheriff has hisself a long look at Zack, and hunches down to see my Riverside real close, and has me slam shut the door of the shed on him. He says for sure the wind must have shut the door and how I got to have that loose peg fixed. He says it's self-killing looks like, but he has to figure close on account I ain't got a witness can say I was hunting for sure. He says Zack won't mind if he goes and sets under the shade and figures some.

"I fix us some meat and greens in my shack, and he comes in to eat. But instead he arrests me. Till I meet Judge Grover down at the county court in Glitchen, I don't know how the Sheriff figured me for killing Zack. But there's the tree outside the bars of this cell, and here I set.

"He tells the Judge how there ain't no shell in the right-hand barrel of the Riverside gun and how Zack's right-hand thumb is snugged down on the right-hand trigger. He says how when you twist a gun upside down to stick the barrels in your mouth, it's your *left-hand* thumb that pushes the trigger for the right-hand barrel.

"I see it all plain how he's right and has got me. When a man's used guns for fifty-five years and makes that kind of mistake, he rates hanging like me. Don't know's it matters. My trees ain't bore fruit for years, and even did I get the cash from Ben, I'd be owing Zack for more years and he'd one time get my place. I got to laugh to think I'm gonna hang like one of them apples on the tree outside these here bars, when the sun's atop Old Yoke Pine today. . . ."

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THIS LOOKS LIKE MURDER

by Q. PATRICK

LIEUTENANT TRANT OF THE NEW York Homicide Bureau picked up the insisting phone in the squad room.

"Police!" gasped a woman's voice. "This is Marian Alberts — 640 East Seventy-eighth. Come — come quickly. He shot me."

Trant blinked. "Who shot you?"

"George. George Willis. He's escaping on the express to San Francisco. Get him. But, oh, come quickly. I think I'm dy . . ."

There was a choking sob followed by the clatter of a dropped receiver. Then, faint and playful from the other end of the wire, came the surprising tinkle of a Strauss waltz.

Tum-ti-*tum*. Tum-ti-*tum*.

Stung by the urgency of this most unorthodox call, Trant shouted to Sergeant Riley: "Get to Grand Central and pick up a George Willis off the express to San Francisco." Leaving rapid instructions, he sped in a police car to Seventy-eighth Street. Mrs. Marian Alberts was listed for the fourth floor. He ran upstairs and rang. There was no reply. He was about to force an entry when a girl's cool voice behind him said:

"If you must beat down doors, pick someone else's. My aunt hates drafts."

He turned. A slim blonde in mink with very blue eyes stood clasping a package of unromantic groceries. He explained the call. Shakily she opened the door with a key and dumped her groceries next to a pigskin hatbox in the hall.

They both hurried into a large living room. Sprawled across a flowered carpet, with a telephone receiver dangling above her, lay a middle-aged woman.

"Aunt Marian!" cried the girl.

Together they dropped to the woman's side. Trant's trained eye surveyed the wound just above the heart. She was clearly dead. He scanned the floor for a gun. None was visible. He rose. On the table, beside the phone, a carved wooden cigarette box, and a radio, stood a small aquarium of tropical fish. Something gleamed dully across the smashed water weed at the tank's bottom. Lifting the lid, he reached through scurrying fish and pulled out a small pistol.

The girl was clutching a cigarette like a lifeline. Trant held a match to her sympathetically. "Smoke. It'll help. You're her niece?"

"Yes. Cordelia Ash." She gave a faint, grateful smile. "I live here. I've just come back from work. I'm a model."

"Recognize this gun?" Trant asked.

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"Yes. It's Aunt Marian's. She's — was nervous of burglars."

"Who's George Willis?"

"George? How do you know his name?"

"Just be an answering machine, Miss Ash. You'll find it'll keep the shock back."

"He's Aunt's latest protégé, her partner. He's starting a business — fabrics. Aunt's put up the capital."

"How much?"

"All she had. There's a paper. A sort of contract."

"And a will?"

"Not that I know of. Just some insurance policies. Unless she's changed them, I'm the beneficiary."

"Can I see them?"

The cigarette in her lips, the girl moved dazedly to a Victorian painting of a benevolent greyhound and opened it like a door. From the safe beyond she brought Trant some documents.

He glanced through the insurance policies which had been taken out a year before and, at Mrs. Alberts' death, brought her niece twenty thousand dollars. He then studied a much more interesting paper — a brief legal statement in which Marian Alberts invested one hundred thousand dollars in Willis Fabrics, with the added stipulation that, in the event of her death, the capital remained in the full possession of George Willis.

Trant whistled. "Why was she so enthusiastic about Willis Fabrics?"

The girl looked embarrassed. "She was in love with him. He was much younger. It was a mess. But poor Aunt Marian — ever since her husband's death she's been terribly confused. A couple of years ago she even had to go for a while to one of those institutions. It always took this form — falling for very young men."

"And getting killed by them," Trant said.

In spite of its sensational prologue, this seemed a disappointingly open-and-shut case. George Willis not only inherited one hundred thousand dollars by the death of the pathetically romantic Mrs. Alberts; he had even been denounced by his dying victim. George Willis — a thoroughly commonplace murderer.

Then, suddenly, a Viennese waltz began to dance in Trant's memory, each note shimmering like a tropical fish. His interest soared. A commonplace murderer — indeed!

Soon the apartment was swarming with his men and later a ruffled Sergeant Riley arrived with George Willis.

"I got him just before the train started."

George Willis was a young man with exasperated eyes. He barked: "Heaven knows, I'm sorry for poor Marian. But I insist —"

"I know," Trant studied him thoughtfully. "You didn't kill her. You just stopped in to tell her you were walking out on her. The capital for Willis Fabrics seemed like a fine idea, but the emotional demands that went with it were a little too much. Right?"

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George Willis gaped. "How on earth did you know? I explained I couldn't go through with it. It wasn't fair to her. I told her to tear up the agreement. I . . ."

"In her way," mused Trant, "Mrs. Alberts must have been a rather remarkable woman. She knew she'd lost you, but she didn't tear up the agreement. She shot herself instead — so you could have the money without strings."

"Shot herself!" shouted Sergeant Riley. "With the gun in the fish tank?"

"Ah. That brings us into a different field." Trant turned almost sadly to Cordelia Ash. "They tell me that models, for some mysterious reason, always carry hatboxes to and from work. You came in without a hatbox but there's a charming one in the hall. The groceries were a good casual prop, but that entrance with me was your *second* entrance, wasn't it? You'd come back earlier, found your aunt dead, and done a little restaging. The gun, for example — out of her hand into the closed fish tank to make suicide impossible."

She puffed at a cigarette in icy silence.

"I see your problem, of course," continued Trant. "Those insurance policies were taken out last year — after your aunt had spent some time in a mental home. No company insures against suicide when someone has been institutionalized. You tried to salvage a desperate situation. It was quite a bright idea. If you'd managed to get Mr. Willis convicted of murder, you'd have got the insurance payments and the hundred thousand dollars, too — as next of kin."

Sergeant Riley's thick neck was red. "But you're nuts, Trant! This Alberts dame accused Willis herself over the phone."

"Oh, no, she didn't." Trant crossed to the hand-carved cigarette box. Smiling ruefully at Cordelia Ash, he opened its lid. Instantly came the tinkling melody of a Strauss waltz.

"A woman called me at police headquarters, yes, but it was a woman who, after she'd dramatically claimed to be dying, opened this musical box for a cigarette. I heard the waltz myself. A dying woman isn't apt to reach for a cigarette — not even in a tobacco ad."

He watched Cordelia Ash. No, she was too cool, too goddesslike. Not really the type he admired.

"Imitating your dead aunt's voice, cheating insurance companies, framing a man for murder! Nice if you can get away with it, Miss Ash, but —" He leaned toward her and gently removed the cigarette from her lips — "I'm afraid you're the classic example of the girl who smokes too much."

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Listen, please, to our tale of woe . . . A curious chain of circumstances put us on the track of what promised to be an extraordinary discovery — an unknown swindling story by Charles Dickens. We had learned that the first book-appearance of Dickens's OLIVER TWIST *— even earlier than the first book-edition published in England — was a volume issued in 1837 by Carey, Lea and Blanchard of Philadelphia; and that this edition, by "Boz" (Dickens's pseudonym), contained only the first two chapters of* OLIVER TWIST*; and to fill out the book, the publisher had included "other tales and sketches."*

Now, wouldn't it seem logical and reasonable that a volume clearly titled OLIVER TWIST, *by "Boz," would be filled out with other tales and sketches by "Boz"? And wouldn't it seem equally logical and reasonable that if one of those other tales was a short story of swindling, that tale of crime would be the work of "Boz" — in other words, by Charles Dickens?*

We began the search for the 1837 American edition of OLIVER TWIST, *and it was a long time before we found a copy; and when we did, all our reliance on logic, all our hopes and dreams of reasonableness, crashed mightily. For there, on the foxed title-page, in the clearest of clear type, we read:*

OLIVER TWIST;
or,
THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS.
BY BOZ.
WITH OTHER TALES AND SKETCHES,
FROM
BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY,
AND
THE LIBRARY OF FICTION.

So, the "other tales and sketches" were not by Charles Dickens — at least, not necessarily . . .

But pause, dear reader, and let hope continue to spring eternal in your breast. The swindling story in the 1837 book is called "The Wide-Awake Club," and it is attributed to an author by the name of Rigdum O'Funnidos. Now, Rigdum O'Funnidos is obviously a pen-name — can there be

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the slightest doubt about that? Is it possible that Charles Dickens, who used a pseudonym to sign OLIVER TWIST; *also used the pseudonym of Rigdum O'Funnidos? Is it the* kind *of pen-name Dickens would invent? Does it have the look, the sound, the flavor of a true, genuine, Dickensian pseudonym? Perhaps, maybe, possibly . . .*

So, we began a double-barreled investigation — first, of Dickens's pen-names, and second, of the specific name of Rigdum O'Funnidos. And would you believe it, a thorough search of every possible source we could think of failed to elicit a single fact! We could find no record of Charles Dickens ever having called himself Rigdum O'Funnidos, and we could find no trace whatever of the origin of Rigdum O'Funnidos.

It is still remotely possible, therefore, that "The Wide-Awake Club" is a hitherto unknown short story by the writer whom the Encyclopædia Britannica calls "the most popular and perhaps the greatest of English novelists" — Charles Dickens . . .

THE WIDE-AWAKE CLUB

by RIGDUM O'FUNNIDOS

IT WAS MY LOT ONE EVENING, A short time since, to be introduced by Mr. Timmins, my landlord, who, seeing I was rather low-spirited, volunteered the invitation to a social community called *The Wide-Awake Club*.

"Sir," said Mr. Timmins, "you looks werry oncomfutable this here nasty evening. Prowisin' it a'n't takin' of too great a liberty, and you feel noways disinclined, I think an hour or two at our club — I have the privilege of introducing a wisiter wot I can answer for in regard to respectability — might do you good."

"And pray, Mr. Timmins, what is the character of this social club?"

"Oh! sir, the character of our club is on-doubted, sir; we are all men of experience, sir: no one is admitted onless he shows he is a wide-awake cove."

"What do you mean by a *wide-awake* cove?" I asked.

"Vy," said Timmins, "there's no one hellgibble to be a member on our society but what gets a woucher from a member that he has a summit to say, and prove wot has made him wide-awake — that is to say, more up and down to the ways of the world than the generality of people."

"You mean, if I understand you rightly, Mr. Timmins, that your club is one where a certain number of per-

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sons meet to spend the social hours of relaxation in giving each other the tale of some particular event or occurrence that has taught them to know there is more roguery in the world than certain philanthropists would lead us to believe."

"You've hit it, sir," said Timmins; "down as a hammer."

"Well, Timmins, I shall be happy to join you," I replied.

During our walk, in answer to certain questions, Timmins informed me that the president of the club was a Mr. Phiggins, a retired draper; and that the leading members were Mr. Pounce, a lawyer's clerk, Mr. Bobb Jinks, a butcher, Mr. Shortcut, a tobacconist, Mr. Sprigs, a fruiterer. "But," said Timmins, "you'll know them all in five minutes. I don't think this wet evening there will be a strong muster; howsomdever, we can console ourselves that, if not numerous, we are select."

"Very proper consolation, Timmins," said I.

When we arrived at *The Three Pies*, the sign of the house where the club was held, Timmins went upstairs to communicate the fact of my being below, and to assure the company that all was regular and right, as he said; and shortly afterwards I was ushered into the presence, and introduced to the worthies previously named. The president, a jolly-looking man about fifty, sat in an elevated chair at the top of a long table, which gave a goodly display of pipes, glasses of grog, etc. On each side, the members sat at their most perfect ease, smoking and chatting. It would appear that they had been at business some time, for it seemed ebb-tide with the contents of the glasses; and several worthies were in the act of knocking the ashes out of their respective pipes. After ordering a glass of punch and a cigar, and another for Timmins, a conversation which was going on before we came in was resumed, of which the following is a faithful report.

"That puts me in mind of M'Flummery," said Pounce, the lawyer's clerk, putting his hand — accidentally, I suppose, of course, — into Shortcut's open screw of tobacco, and filling his pipe therefrom; "I mean him as was hung at the Old Bailey some ten years back."

"And what was he hung for?" asked the president.

"Why, not exactly for his good behaviour. He set out in life as heavy a swell as ever flowed up in the regions of the West End — carried on the game for about a dozen years in bang-up style. — My eye! how precious drunk he made Snatch'em, the bum, and I, one night as we pinned him coming home in his cab from the Opera to give a champagne supper at the Clarendon."

"Champagne supper?" said the president. "Why, champagne is a wine; and no man, I maintain, can make a supper off wine, 'coz wine is drink, and supper, it stands to reason, is eating."

"And no mistake," said Shortcut.

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"With submission, Mr. Chair," replied Pounce, "I'll explain. This champagne supper meant a regular slap-up feed; but no one was allowed any other drink with their grub but champagne punch, made with green tea in a silver kettle."

"I pity their stint," said Jinks.

"Ay," said the president, "that stands to reason. But how did it happen this gentleman came to be hung?"

"Why," continued Pounce, "I was a-coming to that point. As I said just now, there never was a greater dasher at the West End than this M'Flummery; but, like many other swells, he was very often lodging in Queer Street for the want of the ready. One day he came to my old master Snaps, of the Temple, when I was managing common-law clerk, for, you see, he knew my governor well, seeing that he had issued about fourteen writs against him. I never shall forget the day he came; it was a precious wet 'un. He drove up to the gate in a jarvey, and sent a porter down to our office to know if Snaps was in, without sending his name. So Snaps sends me to see who it was, and bring him down. When I got up to the coach, I spied M'Flummery. 'Ah! my man,' says he, quite familiar, 'how do you like champagne punch? Here, just pay this fellow his fare,' says he, quite off-hand. 'I've no change about me;' and off he bolts under the gateway, leaving me to fork out an unknown sum. Well! how was I to know what the jarvey's fare was? That was a poser. I wasn't going to ask him, 'How much?' or where he took up. No! I was too wide-awake!"

"Wide-awake!" said the chairman, and down went a hammer of appropriate brass upon the table three times.

"Hear! hear! hear!" responded *omnes*.

"So I tipped two shillings. 'Vot's this for?' said coachee, holding it open in his hand, and looking at the money in a way money ought never by no means to be looked at. 'Your fare from the Clarendon, Bond Street,' said I, quite stiff and chuff. 'Fare be blowed!' said he; 'my fare's eight bob.' 'Then you shall swear it and prove it,' said I, pulling out a handful of silver, taking his number, and giving the wink to Hobbling Bob, one of the porters, to be witness. 'Take your demand, and we'll meet in Essex Street on Thursday.' 'Well,' says he, 'I ought to have eight bob — what *will* you give me?' 'Two,' said I. 'Well,' says he, 'I a'n't a-going to stand chaffing in the wet with such a ——' and then he abused me in a way I can't repeat. 'Overcharge and insolence!' said I. 'We'll meet again at Philippi.' 'Fillip I,' said Jarvey, driving off, 'I should like to fillip you!' In going back to the office, I thought I ought to charge Mr. M'Flummery the eight shillings — taking into consideration that I had advanced money, that I had got wet, that I had been abused, and last, though not least, that there was a strong risk touching repayment. I

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entered the expenditure thus: 'Coachman's demand, eight shillings. Paid *him*.' I said *him*, not *it*, you see, for I was *wide-awake!*"

"*WIDE-AWAKE!*" said the president, again hitting the table three sonorous clinks with the club-hammer of brass.

"When I got back to the office, Snaps called for me through the pipe to come upstairs — he always had me as a witness when he was doing *particular* business, such as discounting a bill, bargaining for a bond, or arranging an annuity.

" 'Sort those papers,' said Snaps, scratching his left ear.

"That means 'Cock your listeners,' thought I; and I proceeded to fumble over a bundle of old abstracts as diligently as if I was hunting for a hundred-pound note.

"As I turned over the dusty papers, I overheard the following conversation:

" 'So you can't manage it for me?' said M'Flummery to Snaps.

" 'I have not anything at my banker's,' answered Snaps — a lie, for his was the best account of any professional man at Brookes and Dixon's, and I had that morning paid in five hundred and eighty pounds eleven and tenpence — 'and, by-the-by, Pounce, my confidential man, knows that. Have I, Pounce?'

" 'Not anything,' said I; 'I'll be on my oath!'

"With that M'Flummery said, 'It's cursed hard. I must be at Newmarket on Tuesday, and nothing less than two thousand will do for me. So you cannot get it on my bond or note?'

" 'Money is money, and holders are firm,' said Snaps. 'What do you think of a mortgage? You raised, if I recollect right, only six thousand for the hunting lodge and the acres in Leicestershire.'

" 'Yes!' replied M'Flummery, 'and lost it six months since in one morning, at Graham's.'

" 'The house in Park Lane?'

" 'Belongs to Miss V., the rich old maid.'

" 'The furniture?'

" 'Is Gillow's.'

" 'Your stud?'

" 'I stalled Tattersall's for six hundred advance.'

" 'Your commission?'

" 'Is pounded at Greenwood's for ditto.'

" 'Then, in point of fact,' said Snaps, 'Mister,' — (whenever Snaps intended to say anything uncivil, he always addressed the favoured individual as 'Mr.') — 'in point of fact, Mr. M'Flummery, you are a beggar, possessing neither house, land, goods, or chattels, or property of any sort, kind or description.'

"M'Flummery bit his lips, and walked to the window, and Snaps continued, 'How, after making the avowals you have, Mr. M'Flummery, you could have the impudence —'

" 'What do you say, wretch?' cried M'Flummery, rushing and collaring Snaps. 'Impudence!'

" 'Pounce,' cried my master, 'an

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assault! Call the copying clerks up.' But while I was in the act of summoning the scribes down the pipe, M'Flummery relaxed his hold, and said,

" 'I forgive you, Snaps! It certainly did warrant the term, after my declarations of insolvency; but it just flashes across my mind — how it could have escaped me I know not — that all is not so bad with me. I have a chest of plate!'

" 'A chest of plate!' said Snaps.

" 'Yes,' continued M'Flummery, 'my splendid sporting service — quite new, never used, made not six months since by Rundell and Bridge. How could I have forgotten this!'

" 'Sit down, my dear sir,' said Snaps. 'Your recollection of this *com-plete-ly* alters the case! Perhaps we *can* manage the matter.'

" 'But money is money, I am afraid; and holders are firm, Mr. Snaps,' said M'Flummery, with what I thought the most devilish and malicious laugh that ever was uttered.

" 'True, true,' replied my master; 'but there is a mode of tempting even a miser.'

" 'I think there is,' said M'Flummery, just as Old Nick might have spoken the words, and looking Snaps in the face.

" 'Where is the chest?' inquired Snaps. 'There is no lien on it?' he continued gravely. 'It is not at —'

" 'My uncle's? No, No!'

" 'Satisfactory so far. What might it have cost you?'

" 'Three thousand pounds.'

" 'And you want two. It is possible, my dear sir, that the matter *can* be managed. I'll see about it directly. Call here tomorrow with the chest, and we'll see what can be done. I'll go into the city directly.'

" 'Then I may as well go with you,' said M'Flummery; 'I will look in at Rundell's on our way, where you can assure yourself of the fact and value of the purchase.'

"So saying, my master and his client went out."

"It does not yet seem clear to me," said the president, interrupting Pounce, "how the gentleman came to be hung. He seems to have been an honest man, who had more money than he thought he had."

"No, he had not," said Pounce; "for, before he went out of the office, I asked him for the fare of the coach. 'Oh!' said he, quite cool, 'my little quill-driver, I'll owe you that till to-morrow.'

"Well," resumed Pounce; "when Mr. Snaps returned in the afternoon, he said to me, rubbing his hands, 'Pounce, it's all right! I have seen the chest of plate. I have handled and examined every article — solid and beautiful! as fine a service as ever was turned out of hand.'

" 'Glad to hear it, sir!' says I; 'I had my doubts' — throwing as much of knowingness into my look as befitted a confidential managing common-law clerk when speaking of his governor.

" 'And so had I,' said Snaps, seriously: 'but what do you think,

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Pounce?' and my master beckoned me close to him.

" 'What should I think, sir?' said I, deferentially.

" 'Why, he not only bought this most splendid service of plate I ever saw, but — but —'

" 'Yes, sir?'

" 'But he actually paid for it!' said Snaps; giving me a playful dig in the ribs with one hand, while he took a huge pinch of snuff in the other, snapping the dust off his fingers as though so many crackers were exploding.

" 'I shouldn't have thought he was a good one for paying, Mr. Snaps.'

" 'Nor I, Pounce,' said Snaps, 'but, hark ye, be sure you are in the way to-morrow at three.'

"The very next day, at three punctual, came M'Flummery, and I'm blessed if it didn't take four porters to carry the chest he brought with him. (By the way, I may here promiscuously observe, that in the experience of a long professional life I never knew but one case of unpunctuality in the attendance of people who had to *receive* money, and that was explained by the fact of the party's dying of the cholera over night.) The chest was duly brought up stairs, and deposited in a corner of Mr. Snaps's private room.

" 'Now, Snaps,' said M'Flummery, 'I hope you are ready with the needful two thousand upon the nail.'

" 'Why, my dear sir,' said my master, 'I have with great difficulty been able to manage *one* thousand.'

" 'Two thousand was the sum agreed on,' said M'Flummery.

" 'True, my dear sir, but money is money.'

" 'Ay! and holders are firm, it appears, Snaps. But look at the security; plate will always fetch a safe and certain sum.'

" 'Satisfactory; truly so, my dear sir. Most unquestionable; but —'

" 'Come, we are losing time. In a word, put fifteen hundred down on the desk, and we close; if not, I'm off to old Lombard.'

" 'Say twelve hundred,' cried Snaps, 'and I'll see what I can do.'

" 'Fifteen,' said M'Flummery.

" 'It will not leave me a farthing,' said Snaps; 'and if I do find the odd five hundred, it must be added to the bond.'

" 'Well, add it, and be d—d to you!' said M'Flummery, 'you shall have your bond;' and he burst out into what I considered an unnecessary loud laugh.

"The money was counted, and the bond drawn out.

" 'But now,' said my master, 'if you please, you'll pardon me, my dear sir; but, in order that there may be no mistake, you will let my confidential clerk, Pounce, take a view of the contents of the chest.'

" 'Most certainly,' said M'Flummery; and unlocking it, he desired me to see if the articles corresponded with the inventory.

"I did so, and found that my master gave an approving look. After lifting up the several trays, and

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handling and examining some four or five articles, M'Flummery, turning to Snaps, said, 'Are you satisfied, Mr. Snaps?'

"'Quite so,' said my master.

"'Then there only remains one thing to satisfy me,' said M'Flummery, locking the box and padlocks. 'This box will be in your possession for eighteen months as security; but, as I do not wish to have *my plate hired out* or *used* — you will pardon me, Mr. Snaps, I only say this in order that there may be "no mistake," — I will put my seal upon the chest, and keep the key!'

"'The key!' said Snaps; 'my dear sir!'

"'Why,' said M'Flummery, 'what do you want with the key? You have the power at the end of eighteen months to break open the chest, and sell the plate, in default of payment; but you have no power over the plate till then. What, therefore, do *you* want with the key?'

"Snaps was beginning to say something; but M'Flummery stopped him short by saying, 'It is a bargain, or it is not, Mr. Snaps. I seal the chest, and keep the key.'

"'Very well,' said Snaps, looking very much like a tiger that had suddenly lost sight of his dinner.

"This was accordingly done, the bond signed, and the money handed over; and M'Flummery shook hands with my master, saying,

"'Snaps, you are a cunning fellow!'

"'Oh! my dear sir,' said my master, attempting to blush, a feat, by the way, he never accomplished during his life that I know of.

"'But I recollect,' continued M'Flummery, 'an old fisherman telling me, when I was a boy, that, deep as some fishes were in the sea, there were always others that swam just as deep. Good-bye, old fellow — you shall have your bond.'

"So saying, he left.

"I confess, this curious remark so astounded me that I quite forgot at the moment to ask for the fare of the coach. My master also seemed struck with the observation.

"'What can he mean?' said Snaps; 'surely there is nothing wrong? Pooh! pooh! impossible! There is the chest, and possession is nine points of the law.'

"'The first of the maxims, sir,' said I."

Here Pounce paused, filled his pipe, and emptied his tumbler of grog.

"Well!" said the president, "may I be spiflicated — ay, and *exspiflicated* — if you have not been humbugging us, Pounce, with a pretty piece of bam! What the deuce has all that you have said to do with the fact of the gentleman being hung?"

"Everything," cried Pounce.

"I say *nothing*," said the president.

"So do I," followed Shortcut.

"Everything, I maintain," rejoined the lawyer's clerk; "for six months afterwards his words came true."

"Whose?" shouted several of the company.

"M'Flummery's," said Pounce. "He

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proved himself as deep and deeper than Snaps. He was *wide-awake!*"

"*WIDE-AWAKE!*" said the chairman; and down went the directing sceptre with the customary clink.

"Hear! hear! hear!" resounded through the room.

"Yes," continued Pounce; "about six months after, and about five in the evening, a man came into the office, looking as like a turnkey or Bow Street runner as any of you gentlemen might ever have known in your life. He asked to see Mr. Snaps.

"Just as I was preparing to give my master a hint by one of the writing-clerks to be on his guard, who should walk into the office but Snaps himself.

" 'I believe your name is Snaps?' said the hanging-gallows-looking messenger.

"Snaps was rather near-sighted, and it was getting dark, so that he did not see the sinks and nods of the head I was giving him.

" 'My name is Snaps,' he answered.

" 'You're done,' thought I.

" 'Then you are the person I am to give this letter to,' says the man.

"Snaps took the letter — and, strange to say, it *was* a letter — coolly read it, and folding it up, said, to my great relief, 'Tell the prisoner I shall attend,' and off went Grimgruffinhoff with his answer.

" 'M'Flummery is in Newgate for passing forged notes,' said my master, taking a pinch of snuff. 'I thought he would be jugged some day,' he said, with a half-laugh. 'He wants to see me to-morrow morning about business of the greatest importance to *me*. What can he have to say to *me*!'

" 'Ay, indeed!' said I, 'what, sir?'

" 'It is as well that I should go,' said my master, 'for there may be something —'.

"The next morning we went to Newgate, which is not the most pleasant lodging in that neighbourhood, although you have it in the biggest house, and they charge you nothing for apartments. When we entered the prisoner's cell, he was busy writing.

" 'Snaps!' said he, 'I am glad to see you here.'

" 'I am sorry I cannot return the compliment,' said my master.

" 'Never mind,' said M'Flummery; 'every dog has his day.'

" 'And then he is hanged,' said Snaps, drily, taking a pinch of snuff.

"M'Flummery here gave a spasmodic groan, and exclaimed, 'As little reference to my present condition as possible, Mr. Snaps. It was not about myself that I requested your visit, but touching matters in which you alone are interested.'

" 'Well, sir, and here I am,' said Mr. Snaps. 'To tell you the truth, I do not feel myself very comfortable in the place, so I shall feel obliged by your stating the nature of your business with me as briefly as possible.'

" 'I will,' said the prisoner. 'You have, or rather *think* you have, Mr. Snaps, a chest of plate.'

" 'What!' shrieked my master. 'Have you cheated me?'

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"'You have often robbed me, Mr. Snaps,' was the reply; 'but I returned the compliment. That which you believe is silver plate, manufactured by Rundell and Bridge, was made at Sheffield, and cost me two hundred pounds.'

"Snaps groaned, and hid his face.

"'It is true I did buy a genuine service from those eminent goldsmiths; but after the Sheffield firm had copied the pattern, I pledged it with old Lombard, the pawnbroker. It was redeemed for a day to satisfy you, Mr. Snaps, and then *repledged*. The Earl of A. now has the real property, of which you have the counterfeit service.'

"'You are a cursed villain,' said my master; 'and thank Heaven! you will be hanged!'

"'Only that a felon's cell in Newgate is not the most fit place to bandy compliments in, I should happily wish the same of you, Snaps!'

"'And was it to tell me this, you atrocious scoundrel, that you sent for me?' said my master.

"'Not exactly,' answered M'Flummery; 'not exactly, Snaps; I want you to do me a favour!'

"'Was there ever such audacity?' said Snaps. 'Ask me to do you a favour! You, who have told me to my face that you have swindled, cheated, plundered, robbed me! A favour! Come, Pounce,' he added, turning to me, 'let us be gone.'

"'Stay!' said the prisoner; 'you have said I shall be hanged.'

"'Ay, as sure as fate!'

"'My fate is death, I know; but not perhaps by hanging. I have potent interest at work for me at this moment; and though sure of conviction, I may yet get the sentence of death commuted to transportation for life, and you would not like that, would you, Snaps? You wish me dead — dead — dead!'

"After an inward struggle my master muttered out, 'I do.'

"'Then, Mr. Clerk,' said M'Flummery, in a deep whisper, handing me secretly a small sealed paper, 'be so good as to open this, when you get outside these walls, and give it to your master.' Then, aloud to Snaps, 'My business with you, *sir*, is finished.' So saying, he resumed writing; and I led my master, who was trembling with agitation, revenge, and passion, out of the cell and prison.

"When we got into a coach, I produced the paper, and mentioned to my master what M'Flummery had said. With trembling hand he opened it, and read the following:

"'Your soul burns with revenge. You wish me dead. It is my desire also to die. There is a strong probability that I shall not undergo the last punishment of the law. If you would render my death certain, and feed your revenge, send me in a small phial an ounce of prussic acid; and the bearer of your welcome gift shall carry back the fact that M'Flummery, the swindler, highwayman, and forger — M'Flummery, who has cheated all through life — terminated his career by cheating the law!'

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"I shall never to my dying day forget the face of Snaps when he read this. He did not say a word; and we sat silent till we got back to the office. My master went upstairs, saying to me, 'Pounce, be silent as the grave! and be ready when I call you.' Shortly afterwards I heard a loud hammering in his room. 'He's breaking open the chest,' said I; and true enough he was. Curiosity led me up stairs; and, on entering the room, there was Snaps, standing aghast over the open chest, with some broken tea-spoons in his hand.

" 'The villain has told the truth,' said he. 'The contents of the chest are not worth fifty pounds. I thought I had taken every precaution; but I find I was not wide-awake.' "

"*WIDE-AWAKE!*" said the chairman, and down went the hammer.

"Hear! hear! hear!" chorused all. "Not sufficiently wide-awake."

"And ever since then, gentlemen," said Pounce, "I have always had my eyes open when doing a bill, when I had plate, the best of all possible security."

"But what became of M'Flummery?" asked Bob Jinks.

"Ay!" said the president. "When was he hung?"

"He wasn't hung at all," replied Pounce.

"I'm blowed," said the chairman, "if I didn't think so all along."

"*How* he got it I do not pretend to know," said Pounce blowing his nose, and looking aside, "but the very next day after we had paid him a visit, he was found dead on his bed, with a small empty phial, that smelt strongly of prussic acid, clenched in his fist."

The clock here struck twelve, the hour at which the club disperses according to the rules; so Timmins and I toddled home and got us to bed. . . .

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you —

The winner of the $2,000 First Prize in our 1951 contest:

Thomas Flanagan's THE COLD WINDS OF ADESTA

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John Dickson Carr's THE CUSTOMERS LIKE MURDER

Richard Hull's MRS. BRIERLEY SUPPLIES THE EVIDENCE

H. C. Bailey's THE AFFAIR OF THE ZODIACS

T. S. Stribling's THE MYSTERY OF THE HALF-PAINTED HOUSE

Rafael Sabatini's THE SCAPULARY

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THE CASE OF THE TAXI-CAB MURDER

by AUSTIN RIPLEY

BROWN, THE TAXI DRIVER, POINTED to the body of a dead man sitting upright in the center of the back seat. "This stiff was talkin' to a dame in front of the Hotel Burch when I pulled up there and delivered a passenger.

"He hailed me as I was about to shove off, and tole me to drive him to the Burlington crossroad. I knew the shortest way, but the dame tells me to take a longer route over the old bumpy road, and when he says O. K., I did it. That's why it took me so long to get there."

"Go on," Professor Fordney told the driver

"Honest, mister, I don't know how he got that knife in his heart. I didn't stop once — beat every light in the city and when I drew up at the crossroad and he made no move to get out, I turned around and saw that knife stickin' in him! There was a pole-light right there so I could see it plainly.

"I just felt his pulse, then I beat it for headquarters — fast. I knew he was dead. I've seen plenty of stiffs in my time. But how that knife got in his heart, unless he stabbed himself, I don't know."

"Was the lady tall or short?"

"Short and thin . . . but nice lookin'. . . ."

"Was the passenger you delivered to the hotel a woman?"

"Yeah . . . . an old dame. . . ."

"You're lying, Brown, so I'm going to hold you," interrupted the Professor.

How did Fordney know Brown was lying? You will find the solution at the bottom of the page, printed upside-down.

It would have been physically impossible for the body of a dead man to have been sitting upright in the center of the seat, especially when the taxi drove over an old bumpy road.

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

THE CASE OF THE ANGRY MOURNER *by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER* (MORROW, $2.50)	". . . carries the usual Gardner punch." (LGO)	". . . full of zip and gavel-pounding. Bell-ringer." (SC)
THE NOONDAY DEVIL *by URSULA CURTISS* (DODD, MEAD, $2.50)	"Suspense and romance good; plot beautifully articulated; writing in the best glossy-paper style." (LGO)	". . . plausible personnel . . . good pace and plenty of zing. Nicely handled." (SC)
YELL BLOODY MURDER *by JOSEPH SHALLITT* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	"Fair enough mystery and good entertainment value." (LGO)	"Characters largely overdrawn stereotypes; dialogue painfully flip; slow-starter, but pace improves." (SC)
MURDER IN BLACK AND WHITE *by DAVID ALEXANDER* (RANDOM HOUSE, $2.50)	"If you don't demand logic or probability, there's a certain insane charm about these . . . items." (LGO)	"Amazing, merry mish-mash . . . until mental indigestion makes you long for . . . less whimsy . . ." (KS)
MAN DEAD *by SELWYN JEPSON* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . cast of characters . . . small and vividly alive . . . nonstop flight, jet-propelled." (LGO)	"Lady in case does all usual wrong things . . . devilishly complicated situation. Exasperating." (SC)
MIAMI MURDER-GO-ROUND *by MARSTON LAFRANCE* (WORLD, $2.50)	". . . rather unfair solution . . . annoyingly brash style . . . lots of speed and action." (LGO)	"Tough villains, tougher hero; official law cooperates nicely for a change. Fast and furious." (SC)
DARK JOURNEY *by FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS* (DODD, MEAD, $2.50)	"French's usual patience and excellent work with material clues . . . plot too fancy . . ." (LGO)	"Honest detection all the way . . . Tops for bean-users." (SC)
THE DARK ROAD *by CLIFFORD KNIGHT* (DUTTON, $2.50)	"Quite possibly . . . an honest attempt at a case-history . . . comes out sounding awfully phony." (LGO)	"Author's 25th book not his best." (SC)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . neither so dazzling nor so inconsequential as some previous Perry Mason stories." (AB)	"This is excellent Gardner." (JS)
". . . writing, characterization and plotting . . . strong and solid throughout . . ." (AB)	". . . tense story . . . deftly plotted and brought off." (DBH)
". . . brightly unhackneyed . . . warmth and irony in . . . writing and characterization . . ." (AB)	"A breathless, exhilarating run around the place which ought to keep you busy enough to be content." (JS)
". . . purely preposterous . . . fixed delusion that eccentricity is a substitute for characterization . . ." (AB)	". . . mortuary humor . . . laborious and very, very eclectic." (JS)
". . . conventional 'suspense' desperately stretching a thin plot to book-length . . ." (AB)	"Excellent idea . . . ineptly developed to the point of ludicrousness." (DBH)
". . . sharper, more vivid prose than many . . . plot . . . absurd . . . not a trace of creative individuality." (AB)	". . . effort to be hard-boiled that falls on its face . . . language . . . extremely trying." (JS)
"The master of the pure detective story . . ." (DBH)	". . . a deplorable tangle of improbability . . . disappointment . . ." (JS)
". . . a disappointing story as its exciting premise . . . is dissipated in pedestrian handling." (DBH)	". . . quasi-mental gyrations of one tedious ass . . . stricken by a determination to kill another . . ." (JS)

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in The New York Times*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review of Literature*

DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in The Los Angeles Daily News*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in The San Francisco Chronicle*

KS: *Kathleen Sproul in The Saturday Review of Literature*

JS: *James Sandoe in The New York Herald Tribune*

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Many writers start their professional careers as anything but writers. W. Somerset Maugham, Conan Doyle, A. J. Cronin began as doctors; Arthur Train was originally a lawyer; Brett Halliday earned his living as an engineer; others have broken into life, before breaking into print, as musicians, actors, soldiers, sailors, gamblers, explorers, farmers, diplomats, teachers, magicians — even as private-eyes. Stacy Aumonier, the English novelist and short-story writer, began as a landscape painter, and he was unusually successful in this earliest phase of his professional career. Then he switched to an entirely different field: he became an entertainer, and again was enthusiastically received by his public. But still, we can deduce, Mr. Aumonier was not happy; for during the First World War he started experimenting with putting words together. His first serious effort was a short story called "The Friends." Literary agents refused to handle it — it was the tale of two furniture salesmen who drank themselves to death. Somehow it got into print, and proved a sensation: it was voted one of the fifteen best stories of the year, and clergymen all over the world used the story as a theme for their sermons. And after "The Friends," Mr. Aumonier's fame as a writer increased steadily.

Rebecca West once said of Mr. Aumonier's work: "His creations are dyed in the fast dyes of the authentic imagination . . . he achieves that confusion between the real and the imagined world which is the envy of all artists."

THE PERFECT MURDER

by STACY AUMONIER

One evening in November two brothers were seated in a little *café* in the Rue de la Roquette discussing murders. The evening papers lay in front of them, and they all contained a lurid account of a shocking affair in the Landes district, where a charcoal-burner had killed his wife and two children with a hatchet. From discussing this murder in particular they went on to discussing murder in general.

"I've never yet read a murder case without being impressed by the extraordinary clumsiness of it," remarked Paul, the younger brother. "Here's this fellow murders his victims with his own hatchet, leaves his hat behind in the shed, and arrives at a village hard by with bloody boots."

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"They lose their heads," said Henri, the elder. "In cases like that they are mentally unbalanced, hardly responsible for their actions."

"Yes," replied Paul, "but what impresses me is — what a lot of murders must be done by people who take trouble, who leave not a trace behind."

Henri shrugged his shoulders. "I shouldn't think it was so easy, old boy; there's always something that crops up."

"Nonsense! I'll guarantee there are thousands done every year. If you are living with anyone, for instance, it must be the easiest thing in the world to murder them."

"How?"

"Oh, some kind of accident — and then you go screaming into the street, 'Oh, my poor wife! Help!' You burst into tears, and everyone consoles you. I read of a woman somewhere who murdered her husband by leaving the window near the bed open at night when he was suffering from pneumonia. Who's going to suspect a case like that? Instead of that, people must always select revolvers, or knives, or go and buy poison at the chemist's across the way."

"It sounds as though you were contemplating a murder yourself," laughed Henri.

"Well, you never know," answered Paul; "circumstances might arise when a murder would be the only way out of a difficulty. If ever my time comes I shall take a lot of trouble about it. I promise you I shall leave no trace behind."

As Henri glanced at his brother making this remark he was struck by the fact that there was indeed nothing irreconcilable between the idea of a murder and the idea of Paul doing it. He was a big, saturnine-looking man with a sallow, dissolute face, framed in a black square beard and swathes of untidy gray hair. His profession was that of a traveler in cheap jewelry, and his business dealings were not always of the straightest. Henri shuddered. With his own puny physique, bad health, and vacillating will, he was always dominated by his younger brother. He himself was a clerk in a drapery store, and he had a wife and three children. Paul was unmarried.

The brothers saw a good deal of each other, and were very intimate. But the word friendship would be an extravagant term to apply to their relationship. They were both always hard up, and they borrowed money from each other when every other source failed.

They had no other relatives except a very old uncle and aunt who lived at Chantilly. This uncle and aunt, whose name was Taillandier, were fairly well off, but they would have little to do with the two nephews. They were occasionally invited there to dinner, but neither Paul nor Henri ever succeeded in extracting a franc out of Uncle Robert. He was a very religious man, hard-fisted, cantankerous, and intolerant. His wife was a little more pliable. She was, in effect, an eccentric. She had spasms of generosity, during which periods both

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the brothers had at times managed to get money out of her. But these were rare occasions.

The discussion between the two brothers was presumably forgotten by both of them immediately afterwards. And indeed there is no reason to believe that it would ever have recurred, except for certain events which followed the sudden death of Uncle Robert in the February of the following year.

In the meantime, the affairs of both Paul and Henri had gone disastrously. Paul had been detected in a dishonest transaction over a paste trinket, and had just been released from a period of imprisonment. The knowledge of this had not reached his uncle before his death. Henri's wife had had another baby, and had been very ill. He was more in debt than ever.

The news of the uncle's death came as a gleam of hope in the darkness of despair. What kind of will had he left? Knowing their uncle, each was convinced that, however it was framed, there was likely to be little or nothing for them. However, the old villain might have left them a thousand or two. And in any case, if the money was all left to the wife, here was a possible field of plunder. It need hardly be said that they went with all haste to the funeral, and with even greater alacrity to the lawyer's reading of the will.

The will contained surprises both encouraging and discouraging. In the first place, the old man left a considerably larger fortune than anyone could have anticipated. In the second place, all the money and securities were carefully tied up, and placed under the control of trustees. There were large bequests to religious charities, while the residue was held in trust for the wife. But so far as the brothers were concerned the surprise came at the end. On her death this residue was still to be held in trust, but a portion of the interest was to be divided between Henri and Paul, and on their death to go to the Church. The old man had recognized a certain call of the blood, after all!

They both behaved with tact and discretion at the funeral, and were extremely sympathetic and solicitous towards Aunt Rosalie. It was only when it came to the reading of the will that their avidity and interest outraged perhaps the strict canons of good taste. It was Paul who managed to get it clear from the notary what the exact amount would probably be. Making allowances for fluctuations, accidents, and acts of God, on the death of Mme. Taillandier the two brothers would inherit something between eight and ten thousand francs a year each. She was now eighty-two and very frail.

The brothers celebrated the good news with a carouse up in Montmartre. Naturally, their chief topic of conversation was how long the old bird would keep on her perch. In any case, it could not be many years. With any luck it might be only a few weeks.

There was little they could do but

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await developments. Except that in the meantime — after a decent interval — they might try and touch the old lady for a bit. They parted, and the next day set about their business in cheerier spirits.

For a time they were extremely tactful. They made formal calls on Aunt Rosalie, inquiring after her health, and offering their services in any capacity whatsoever. But at the end of a month Henri called hurriedly one morning, and after the usual professions of solicitude asked his aunt if she could possibly lend him one hundred and twenty francs to pay the doctor who had attended his wife and baby. She lent him forty. A week later came Paul with a story about being robbed by a client. He wanted a hundred. She lent him ten.

When these appeals had been repeated three or four times, and received similar treatment — and sometimes no treatment at all — the old lady began to get annoyed. She was becoming more and more eccentric. She now had a companion, an angular, middle-aged woman named Mme. Chavanne, who appeared like a protecting goddess. Sometimes when the brothers called, Mme. Chavanne would say that Mme. Taillandier was too unwell to see anyone. If this news had been true it would have been good news indeed, but the brothers suspected that it was all prearranged.

Two years went by, and they both began to despair.

It was difficult to borrow money on the strength of the will. In the first place, their friends were more of the borrowing than the lending class. And anyone who had a little was suspicious of the story, and wanted all kinds of securities. It was Paul who first thought of going to an insurance company to try to raise money on the reversionary interest. They did succeed in the end in getting an insurance company to advance them two thousand francs each, but the negotiations took five months to complete, and by the time they had insured their lives, paid the lawyer's fees, paid for the various deeds and stamps, and signed some thirty or forty forms, each man only received a little over a thousand francs, which was quickly lost in paying accrued debts. Their hopes were raised by the dismissal of Mme. Chavanne, only to be lowered again by the arrival of an even more aggressive companion. The companions came and went with startling rapidity. None of them could stand for any time the old lady's eccentricity and ill-temper. The whole of the staff was always being changed. The only one who remained loyal all through was the portly cook, Ernestine. Even this may have been due to the fact that she never came in touch with her mistress. She was an excellent cook, and she never moved from the kitchen. Moreover, the cooking required by Mme. Taillandier was of the simplest nature, and she seldom entertained. And she hardly ever left her apartment. Any complaints that were made were made through the housekeeper.

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Nearly another year passed before what appeared to Paul to be a mild stroke of good fortune came his way. Things had been going from bad to worse. Neither of the brothers was in a position to lend a sou to the other. Henri's family was becoming a greater drag and people were not buying Paul's trinkets.

One day, during an interview with his aunt — he had been trying to borrow more money — Paul fainted in her presence. It is difficult to know what it was about this act which affected the old lady, but she ordered him to be put to bed in one of the rooms of the villa. Possibly she jumped to the conclusion that he had fainted from lack of food, which was not true — Paul never went without food and drink — and she suddenly realized that after all he was her husband's sister's son. He must certainly have looked pathetic, this white-faced man, well past middle-age, and broken in life. Whatever it was, she showed a broad streak of compassion for him. She ordered her servants to look after him, and to allow him to remain until she countermanded the order.

Paul, who had certainly felt faint, but quickly seized the occasion to make it as dramatic as possible, saw in this an opportunity to wheedle his way into his aunt's favors. His behavior was exemplary. The next morning, looking very white and shaky, he visited her, and asked her to allow him to go, as he had no idea of abusing her hospitality. If he had taken up the opposite attitude she would probably have turned him out, but because he suggested going she ordered him to stop. During the daytime he went about his dubious business, but he continued to return there at night to sleep, and to enjoy a good dinner cooked by the admirable Ernestine. He was in clover.

Henri was naturally envious when he heard of his brother's good fortune. And Paul was fearful that Henri would spoil the whole game by going and himself throwing a fit in the presence of the aunt. But this, of course, would have been too obvious and foolish for even Henri to consider seriously. And he racked his brains for some means of inveigling the old lady. Every plan he put forth, however, Paul sat upon. He was quite comfortable himself, and he didn't see the point of his brother butting in.

They quarreled about this, and did not see each other for some time. One would have thought that Henri's appeal to Mme. Taillandier would have been stronger than Paul's. He was a struggling individual, with a wife and four children. Paul was a notorious ne'er-do-well, and he had no attachments. Nevertheless, the old lady continued to support Paul. Perhaps it was because he was a big man, and she liked big men. Her husband had been a man of fine physique. Henri was puny, and she despised him. She had never had children of her own, and she disliked children. She was always upbraiding Henri and his wife for

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their fecundity. Any attempt to pander to her emotions through the sentiment of childhood failed. She would not have the children in her house. And any small acts of charity which she bestowed upon them seemed to be done more with the idea of giving her an opportunity to inflict her sarcasm and venom upon them than out of kindness of heart.

In Paul, on the other hand, she seemed to find something slightly attractive. She sometimes sent for him, and he, all agog — expecting to get his notice to quit — would be agreeably surprised to find that, on the contrary, she had some little commission she wished him to execute. And you may rest assured that he never failed to make a few francs out of all these occasions.

At first she seldom spoke to him, but as time went on she would sometimes send for him to relieve her loneliness. Nothing could have been more ingratiating than Paul's manners in these circumstances. He talked expansively about politics, knowing beforehand his aunt's views, and just what she would like him to say. He humored her every whim. He was astute enough to see that it would be foolish and dangerous to attempt to borrow money for the moment. He was biding his time, and trying to think out the most profitable plan of campaign. There was no immediate hurry. His bed was comfortable, and Ernestine's cooking was excellent. . . .

In another year's time he had established himself as quite one of the permanent household. He was consulted about the servants, and the doctors, and the management of the house, everything except the control of money, which was jealously guarded by a firm of lawyers. Many a time he would curse his uncle's foresight. The old man's spirit seemed to be hovering in the dim recesses of the overcrowded rooms, mocking him. For the old lady, eccentric and foolish in many ways, kept a strict check upon her dividends. It was her absorbing interest in life, that and an old gray parroquet, which she treated like a child. Its name was Anna, and it used to walk up and down her table at mealtimes and feed off her own plate. Finding himself so firmly intrenched, Paul's assurance gradually increased. He began to treat his aunt as an equal, and sometimes even to contradict her, and she did not seem to resent it.

In the meantime, Henri was eating his heart out with jealousy and sullen rage. The whole thing was unfair. He occasionally saw Paul, who boasted openly of his strong position in the Taillandier household, and he would not believe that Paul was not getting money out of the old lady as well as board and lodging. All — or nearly all — Henri's appeals, although pitched in a most pathetic key, were rebuffed. He felt a bitter hatred against his aunt, his brother, and life in general. If only she would die! What was the good of life to a woman at eighty-five or six? And there was he — four young children, clamoring for food,

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and clothes, and the ordinary decent comforts. And there was Paul, idling his days away at cafés and his nights at cabarets.

Meeting Paul one day he said: "I say, old boy, couldn't you spring me a hundred francs? I haven't the money to pay my rent next week."

"She gives me nothing," replied Paul.

Henri did not believe this, but it would be undiplomatic to quarrel. He said: "Aren't there — isn't there some little thing lying about the villa you could slip in your pocket? We could sell it, see? Go shares. I'm desperately pushed."

Paul looked down his nose. Name of a pig! did Henri think he had never thought of that? Many and many a time the temptation had come to him. But no; every few months people came from the lawyer's office, and the inventory of the whole household was checked. The servants could not be suspected. They were not selected without irreproachable characters. If he were suspected — well, all kinds of unpleasant things might crop up. Oh, no, he was too well off where he was. The game was to lie in wait. The old lady simply must die soon. She had even been complaining of her chest that morning. She was always playing with the parroquet. Somehow this bird got on Paul's nerves. He wanted to wring its neck. He imitated the way she would say: "There's a pretty lady! Oh, my sweet! Another nice grape for my little one. There's a pretty lady!" He told Henri all about this, and the elder brother went on his way with a grunt that only conveyed doubt and suspicion.

In view of this position it seemed strange that in the end it was Paul who was directly responsible for the denouement in the Taillandier household. His success went to his rather weak head like wine. He began to swagger and bluster and abuse his aunt's hospitality. And, curiously enough, the more he advanced the further she withdrew. The eccentric old lady seemed to be losing her powers of resistance so far as he was concerned. And he began to borrow small sums of money from her, and, as she acquiesced so readily, to increase his demands. He let his traveling business go, and sometimes he would get lost for days at a time. He would spend his time at the races, and drinking with doubtful acquaintances in obscure cafés. Sometimes he won, but in the majority of cases he lost. He ran up bills and got into debt. By cajoling small sums out of his aunt he kept his debtors at bay for nearly nine months.

But one evening he came to see Henri in a great state of distress. His face, which had taken on a healthier glow when he first went to live with his aunt, had become puffy and livid.

"Old boy," he said, "I'm at my wit's end. I've got to find seven thousand francs by the twenty-first of the month, or they're going to foreclose. How do you stand? I'll pay you back."

To try to borrow money from Henri was like appealing to the desert

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for a cooling draft. He also had to find money by the twenty-first, and he was overdrawn at the bank. They exchanged confidences, and in their mutual distress they felt sorry for each other and for themselves. It was a November evening, and the rain was driving along the boulevards in fitful gusts. After trudging a long way they turned into a little café in the Rue de la Roquette, and sat down and ordered two cognacs. The café was almost deserted. A few men in mackintoshes were scattered around reading the evening papers. They sat at a marble table in the corner and tried to think of ways and means. But after a time a silence fell between them. There seemed nothing more to suggest. They could hear the rain beating on the skylight. An old man four tables away was poring over *La Patrie*.

Suddenly Henri looked furtively around the room and clutched his brother's arm.

"Paul!" he whispered.

"What is it?"

"Do you remember — it has all come back to me — suddenly — one night, a night something like this — it must be five or six years ago — we were seated here in this same café — do you remember?"

"No. I don't remember. What was it?"

"It was the night of that murder in the Landes district. We got talking about — don't you remember?"

Paul scratched his temple and Henri leaned closer to him.

"You said — you said that if you lived with anyone, it was the easiest thing in the world to murder them. An accident, you know. And you go screaming into the street ——"

Paul started, and stared at his brother, who continued:

"You said that if ever you — you had to do it, you would guarantee that you would take every trouble. You wouldn't leave a trace behind."

Paul was acting. He pretended to half-remember, to half-understand. But his eyes narrowed. Imbecile! Hadn't he been through it all in imagination a hundred times? Hadn't he already been planning and scheming an act for which his brother would reap half the benefit? Nevertheless, he was staggered. He never imagined that the suggestion would come from Henri. He was secretly relieved. If Henri was to receive half the benefit, let him also share half the responsibilities. The risk in any case would be wholly his. He grinned enigmatically, and they put their heads together. And so in that dim corner of the café was planned the perfect murder. . . .

Coming up against the actual proposition, Paul had long since realized that the affair was not so easy of accomplishment as he had so airily suggested. For the thing must be done without violence, without clues, without trace. Such ideas as leaving the window open at night were out of the question, as the companion slept in the same room. Moreover, the old lady was quite capable of getting out

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of bed and shutting it herself if she felt a draft. Some kind of accident? Yes, but what? Suppose she slipped and broke her neck when Paul was in the room. It would be altogether too suspicious. Besides, she would probably only partially break her neck. She would regain sufficient consciousness to tell. To drown her in her bath? The door was always locked or the companion hovering around.

"You've always got to remember," whispered Paul, "if any suspicion falls on me, there's the motive. There's a strong motive why I should — it's got to be absolutely untraceable. I don't care if some people do suspect afterwards — when we've got the money."

"What about her food?"

"The food is cooked by Ernestine, and the companion serves it. Besides, suppose I got a chance to tamper with the food, how am I going to get hold of — you know?"

"Weed-killer?"

"Yes, I should be in a pretty position if they traced the fact that I had bought weed-killer. *You* might buy some and let me have a little on the quiet."

Henri turned pale. "No, no; the motive applies to me too. They'd get us both."

When the two pleasant gentlemen parted at midnight their plans were still very immature, but they arranged to meet the following evening. It was the thirteenth of the month. To save the situation, the deed must be accomplished within eight days. Of course, they wouldn't get the money at once, but, knowing the circumstances, creditors would be willing to wait. When they met the following evening in the Café des Sentiers, Paul appeared flushed and excited, and Henri was pale and on edge. He hadn't slept. He wanted to wash the whole thing out.

"And sell up your home, I suppose?" sneered Paul. "Listen, my little cabbage, I've got it. Don't distress yourself. You proposed this last night. I've been thinking about it and watching for months. Ernestine is a good cook, and very methodical. Oh, very methodical! She does everything every day in the same way, exactly to schedule. My apartment is on the same floor, so I am able to appreciate her punctuality and exactness. The old woman eats sparingly and according to routine. One night she has fish. The next night she has a soufflé made with two eggs. Fish, soufflé, fish, soufflé, regular as the beat of a clock. Now listen. After lunch every day Ernestine washes up the plates and pans. After that she prepares roughly the evening meal. If it is a fish night, she prepares the fish ready to pop into the pan. If it is a soufflé night, she beats up two eggs and puts them ready in a basin. Having done that, she changes her frock, powders her nose, and goes over to the convent to see her sister who is working there. She is away an hour and a half. She returns punctually at four o'clock. You could set your watch by her movements."

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"Yes, but ——"

"It is difficult to insert what I propose in fish, but I don't see any difficulty in dropping it into two beaten-up eggs, and giving an extra twist to the egg-whisk, or whatever they call it."

Henri's face was quite gray.

"But — but — Paul, how are you going to get hold of the — poison?"

"Who said anything about poison?"

"Well, but what?"

"That's where *you* come in."

"I!"

"Yes, you're in it too, aren't you? You get half the spoils, don't you? Why shouldn't you — some time tomorrow when your wife's out ——"

"What?"

"Just grind up a piece of glass."

"Glass!"

"Yes, you've heard of glass, haven't you? An ordinary piece of broken wineglass will do. Grind it up as fine as a powder, the finer the better, the finer the more — effective."

Henri gasped. No, no, he couldn't do this thing. Very well, then; if he was such a coward Paul would have to do it himself. And perhaps when the time came Henri would also be too frightened to draw his dividends. Perhaps he would like to make them over to his dear brother Paul? Come, it was only a little thing to do. Eight days to the twenty-first. Tomorrow, fish day, but Wednesday would be soufflé. So easy, so untraceable, so safe.

"But you," whined Henri, "they will suspect you."

"Even if they do they can prove nothing. But in order to avoid this unpleasantness I propose to leave home soon after breakfast. I shall return at a quarter past three, letting myself in through the stable yard. The stables, as you know, are not used. There is no one else on that floor. Ernestine is upstairs. She only comes down to answer the front-door bell. I shall be in and out of the house within five minutes, and I won't return till late at night, when perhaps — I may be too late to render assistance."

Henri was terribly agitated. On one hand was — just murder, a thing he had never connected himself with in his life. On the other hand was comfort for himself and his family, an experience he had given up hoping for. It was in any case not exactly murder on his part. It was Paul's murder. At the same time, knowing all about it, being an accessory before the fact, it would seem contemptible to a degree to put the whole onus on Paul. Grinding up a piece of glass was such a little thing. It couldn't possibly incriminate him. Nobody could ever prove that he'd done it. But it was a terrible step to take.

"Have another cognac."

It was Paul's voice that jerked him back to actuality. He said: "All right, yes, yes," but whether this referred to the cognac or to the act of grinding up a piece of glass he hardly knew himself.

From that moment to twenty-four hours later, when he handed over a

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white packet to his brother across the same table at the Café des Sentiers, Henri seemed to be in a nightmarish dream. He had no recollection of how he had passed the time. He seemed to pass from that last cognac to this one, and the interval was a blank.

"Fish today, soufflé tomorrow," he heard Paul chuckling. "Brother, you have done your work well."

When Paul went he wanted to call after him to come back, but he was frightened of the sound of his own voice. He was terribly frightened. He went to bed very late and could not sleep. The next morning he awoke with a headache, and he got his wife to telephone the office to say that he was too ill to come in. He lay in bed all day, visualizing over and over again the possible events of the evening.

Paul would be caught. Someone would catch him actually putting the powder into the eggs. He would be arrested. Paul would give *him* away. Why did Paul say it was so easy to murder anyone if you lived with them? It wasn't easy at all. The whole thing was chock-a-block with dangers and pitfalls. Pitfalls! At half-past three he started up in bed. He had a vision of himself and Paul being guillotined side by side! He must stop it at any cost. He began to get up. Then he realized that it was already too late. The deed had been done. Paul had said that he would be in and out of the house within five minutes at three fifteen — a quarter of an hour ago! Where was Paul? Would he be coming to see him? He was going to spend the evening out somewhere, "returning late at night."

He dressed feverishly. There was still time. He could call at his aunt's. Rush down to the kitchen, seize the basin of beaten-up eggs, and throw them away. But where? How? By the time he got there Ernestine would have returned. She would want to know all about it. The egg mixture would be examined, analyzed. God in Heaven, it was too late! The thing would have to go on, and he suffer and wait.

Having dressed, he went out after saying to his wife:

"It's all right. It's going to be all right," not exactly knowing what he meant. He walked rapidly along the streets, with no fixed destination in his mind. He found himself in the café in the Rue de la Roquette, where the idea was first conceived.

He sat there drinking, waiting for the hours to pass.

Soufflé day, and the old lady dined at seven! It was now not quite five. He hoped Paul would turn up. A stranger tried to engage him in conversation. The stranger apparently had some grievance against a railway company. He wanted to tell him all the details about a contract for rivets, over which he had been disappointed. Henri didn't understand a word he was talking about. He didn't listen. He wanted the stranger to drop down dead, or vanish into thin air. At last, he called the waiter and paid for his reckoning, indicated by a small pile of saucers. From there he walked

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rapidly to the Café des Sentiers, looking for Paul. He was not there. Six o'clock. One hour more. He could not keep still. He paid and went on again, calling at café after café. A quarter to seven. Pray God that she threw it away. Had he ground it fine enough?

Five minutes to seven. Seven o'clock. Now. He picked up his hat and went again. The brandy had gone to his head. At half-past seven he laughed recklessly. After all, what was the good of life to this old woman of eighty-six? He tried to convince himself that he had done it for the sake of his wife and children. He tried to concentrate on the future, how he could manage on eight or ten thousand francs a year. He would give notice at the office, be rude to people who had been bullying him for years.

At ten o'clock he was drunk, torpid, and indifferent. The whole thing was over for good or ill. What did it matter? He terribly wanted to see Paul, but he was too tired to care very much. The irrevocable step had been taken. He went home to bed and fell into a heavy drunken sleep.

"Henri! Henri! Wake up! What is the matter with you?"

His wife was shaking him. He blinked his way into a partial condition of consciousness. November sunlight was pouring into the room.

"It's late, isn't it?" he said, involuntarily.

"It's past eight. You'll be late at the office. You didn't go yesterday. If you go on like this you'll get the sack, and then what shall we do?"

Slowly the recollection of last night's events came back to him.

"There's nothing to worry about," he said. "I'm too ill to go today. It'll be all right."

His wife looked at him searchingly. "You've been drinking," she said. "Oh, you men! God knows what will become of us."

She appeared to be weeping in her apron. It struck him forcibly at that instant how provoking and small women are. Here was Jeannette crying over her petty troubles. Whereas he ——

The whole thing was becoming vivid again. Where was Paul? What had happened? Was it at all likely that he could go down to an office on a day like this, a day that was to decide his fate?

He groaned, and elaborated rather pathetically his imaginary ailments, anything to keep this woman quiet. She left him at last, and he lay there waiting for something to happen. The hours passed. What would be the first intimation? Paul or the gendarmes? Thoughts of the latter stirred him to a state of fevered activity. About midday he arose, dressed, and went out. He told his wife he was going to the office, but he had no intention of doing so. He went and drank coffee at a place up in the Marais. He was terrified of his old haunts. He wandered from place to place, uncertain how to act. Late in the afternoon he entered a café in the Rue Alibert. At a kiosk outside he bought a late edition

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of an afternoon newspaper. He sat down, ordered a drink and opened the newspaper. He glanced at the central news page, and as his eye absorbed one paragraph he unconsciously uttered a low scream. The paragraph was as follows:

MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT CHANTILLY

A mysterious affair occurred at Chantilly this morning. A middle-aged man, named Paul Denoyel, complained of pains in the stomach after eating an omelette. He died soon after in great agony. He was staying with his aunt, Mme. Taillandier. No other members of the household were affected. The matter is to be inquired into.

The rest was a dream. He was only vaguely conscious of the events which followed. He wandered through it all, the instinct of self-preservation bidding him hold his tongue in all circumstances. He knew nothing. He had seen nothing. He had a visionary recollection of a plump, weeping Ernestine, at the inquest, enlarging upon the eccentricities of her mistress. A queer woman, who would brook no contradiction. He heard a lot about the fish day and the soufflé day, and how the old lady insisted that this was a fish day, and that she had had a soufflé the day before. You could not argue with her when she was like that. And Ernestine had beaten up the eggs all ready for the soufflé — most provoking! But Ernestine was a good cook, of method and economy. She wasted nothing. What should she do with the eggs? Why, of course, Mr. Paul, who since he had come to live there was never content with a *café complet*. He must have a breakfast, like these English and other foreigners do. She made him an omelette, which he ate heartily.

Then the beaten-up eggs with their deadly mixture were intended for Mme. Taillandier? But who was responsible for this? Ernestine? But there was no motive here. Ernestine gained nothing by her mistress's death. Indeed, she only stood to lose her situation. Motive? Was it possible that the deceased — The inquiry went on a long while. Henri himself was conscious of being in the witness-box. He knew nothing. He couldn't understand it. His brother would not be likely to do that. He himself was prostrate with grief. He loved his brother.

There was nothing to do but return an open verdict. Shadowy figures passed before his mind's eye — shadowy figures and shadowy realizations. He had perfectly murdered his brother. The whole of the dividends of the estate would one day be his, and his wife's and children's. Eighteen thousand francs a year! One day —

One vision more vivid than the rest — the old lady on the day following the inquest, seated bolt upright at her table, like a figure of perpetuity, playing with the old gray parroquet, stroking its mangy neck.

"There's a pretty lady! Oh, my sweet! Another nice grape for my little one. There's a pretty lady!"

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WOULD POE SELL TODAY?

One night, in 1916, a group of six people were gathered around a fire, talking about the state of the short story as it was then being published in American magazines. Three of the group were short-story writers, two were editors, and the sixth was a publisher. Suddenly the question came up: "If Poe were living in 1916, would American magazines publish his stories?"

It was the concensus of opinion that they would not. The six people, all experts in the field, then asked themselves: "Why? Why would Poe's stories be rejected by American periodicals in this, the enlightened age?"

Some thought that it was because critical standards had changed, others laid the blame on the then-powerful influence of O. Henry. But after further discussion it was agreed that at that time there was a strict taboo against "grim or gruesome stories," that American editors firmly believed that their readers wanted only stories with happy endings.

This led to speculation as to whether or not the leading short-story writers of the day had tales still in manuscript, lying unhonored and unsung in their dusty files — tales too gruesome for so-called popular taste. And then one of the six got an inspiration: why not get in touch with all the well-known short-story writers and collect thirteen unpublished tales which had suffered repeated rejection by American magazines, put them together in a book, and see what the public would have to say?

The deed was done. The volume appeared in 1917, titled THE GRIM 13, *with an Introduction by Edward J. O'Brien, the celebrated originator of the classic series of anthologies called* THE BEST SHORT STORIES *of each year. Mr. O'Brien was one of the six people who developed the idea of* THE GRIM 13, *and it is to Mr. O'Brien's account of that fateful night that we owe this anecdote.*

We now give you one of those 13 grim stories — "The Head of His House" by Conrad Richter who, since that night on which THE GRIM 13 *was born, has come a long way —* THE SEA OF GRASS, *and that fine trilogy of the Ohio frontier,* THE TREES, THE FIELDS, *and* THE TOWN (*which won the Pulitzer Prize for 1951*).

What was considered "grim" in 1917 is not necessarily grim or gruesome today. Nevertheless, we cannot help asking the same question propounded by the original six: "If Poe were living now — in 1952 — would American magazines publish his stories?" What do you think? Do you see

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even the slightest possibility of "The Saturday Evening Post" printing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"? — which first appeared in another Philadelphia class-magazine. Do you think there is the remotest chance that "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" would be accepted by, say, "Woman's Home Companion" or "Ladies' Home Journal"? Farfetched markets? By no means! "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" first appeared as a serial in Snowden's "Ladies' Companion." Would Poe sell today? We doubt it — we doubt it very much . . .

We cannot close without quoting what Mr. O'Brien said in his 1917 Introduction to a book of short stories rated unpublishable by American magazine editors of that time: "It behooves every American writer to search deeply in his heart for the assurance that his creative work is the sincere and uninfluenced expression of what he most desires to say. It is specially necessary that he should not permit himself to compromise his standards by yielding to the pressure of high commercial rewards, when these rewards imply a moulding influence upon his literary work."

THE HEAD OF HIS HOUSE

by CONRAD RICHTER

I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED WHETHER good old Tim, who did what he did, was sanctioned by God as head of the house of Mast.

Tim had always been my ideal head of a house. Kindly, humble, lovable, quaint, dependable as daylight, he ruled over his little twenty-foot-front kingdom with a rule that I, a neighbor boy, or anyone else, never felt was there until we committed some crime against it — broke one of his rose bushes or tormented the alley cat. And then Tim's calling us to account was so frank and gentle that it made every boy of us in the square love him almost like a father.

His wife was queen of his little kingdom. When she was on the front porch I never saw him come up the sidewalk without lifting his hat to her with an elaborate sweep and with a twinkle in his eye. As a rule he would pause gravely ten feet away and absurdly ask some respectful question in a solicitous voice perfectly audible to the neighbors for several doors. One time I remember it was, "Beg pardon, but do you think the lady of the house would give me boarding here?"

It seems I can still hear Mrs. Tim repeating to my mother: "Oh, Mrs. Connor. It's the pleasantest husband

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in the world I have." Often today I still see her and Tim rocking disconsolately on their front porch in the throes of the grippe. As if it were yesterday I can hear the old lady's half-sobbed words: "Oh, Tim, nothing tastes good to me any more." And I can still see old Tim shake his head and hear him sadly say: "No use, Lyddy. The sun doesn't shine any more."

They had never had children of their own. That, I think, was the greatest cross Tim had to bear. But he carried it bravely. In his and Mrs. Tim's old age they took a nameless baby from their church orphanage and gave it the name of Mast and the first name of Shirk after Mrs. Mast's family. And now, as the son grew up, I saw the first evidence that some day there was going to be a question of whether Tim would always be the head of his house.

Tim was a well-read man, devouring newspapers, books, and magazines, saving drawers full of clippings that he never had time to read again. But Shirk came from different blood. At the age of sixteen he clamored to stop school. Through one of his companions, he secured a job as call-boy for the railroad, and he offered six dollars a week to Tim just when Mrs. Tim after a long, hard illness had died. Tim had doctor bills and nurse bills and undertaking bills and very little money and nothing more than a rented house. But, although it was only another cross, he gave way to the boy and did not force him back to school. "Tim, Tim," I muttered to myself. "You must watch yourself if you want to stay the head of your house."

For months I saw Tim's pathetic face. Then I brought pressure to bear in the office of the trainmaster where I worked. Before long Shirk was advanced to the office job of night crew-caller. After the third year it paid him sixty dollars a month, and before I knew it he was married.

I think Marjy married him rather because she loved old Tim than because she loved Shirk. She was one of the sweet, unassuming girls in town. She and Tim had often been comrades on walks and talks. Shirk could never understand her or any other's interest in his father. He didn't seem to see an ounce of worth in the old man. And the older he grew, the less he seemed to appreciate Tim. It used to make me blue to think what an amazing father Tim would have made to some other boy. And the worst of it was that every day now Tim was getting nearer the time when, the chances were, Shirk would try to put him out of his own house.

It was as common a matter as insurance that brought the first clash. At our sitting-room window I had been picking apart the Sunday paper. Through the screen across our narrow alleyway I heard old Tim's voice in proud admonition.

"Now, son of mine! You've come to the time when you must do your figuring on double-harness. Go slow

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for a while on cigarettes and movies and pool, and buy your wife a wedding present. It isn't fair to Marjy if you don't take care of her, when you know that the railroad relief only pays funeral expenses."

"I don't see much in life insurance except for a big corporation to make money out of a man," observed Shirk. "You don't have any for us to get anything out of when you die."

"Shirk!" I heard Marjy's voice reproaching him.

"That's to my sorrow, son," came Tim's steady tones. "God knows I would buy it today, but though such things are cheap for the age of you, nobody sells it to an old man."

There was a little silence. Then Tim's voice came firmly.

"Tomorrow, son, you will be going downtown to take out two thousand dollars life insurance. I've read that it would cost you about twenty dollars a thousand. I'll pay one twenty dollars a year, and you will likely want to pay the other."

"I told you I didn't believe in insurance," declared the boy shortly. "Much less in throwing my good money away."

"If you think that, all right," answered old Tim. "Life's too short to try to change certain metals into gold. But tomorrow you're to go downtown and get two thousand dollars life insurance. And as long as you put your feet under my table, my son, you're to remember that I am the head of this house."

"You may be now," Shirk answered sullenly. "But we'll see about that when I'm twenty-one."

"Twenty-one or thirty-one, son," old Tim replied, "if I am alive, I shall be your father, and the head of this house."

The months went on and it drew close to the time when Shirk would be twenty-one. Then one day I noticed that Marjy had become nervous and sallow. When I questioned my mother, she explained it with one five-lettered word. And the next day I heard that Marjy's young husband was gambling with his job. He had begun to sleep on his desk after midnight instead of staying awake and paying attention to business. Just the night before, Logan the night traindispatcher had a hurry call for two crews — one for the yard and one for Belt Line Junction. It was about three o'clock A.M. He rang long for his crew-caller without getting an answer. So he crossed the yards and found Shirk "cocked up" on his desk asleep. The men said it was only Logan's good heart that had agreed to report it next time instead of at once.

I felt my friendship for Tim command me. Much as I disliked to do it, I leaned over the fence between our backyards one evening and told Tim the story.

"They tell me since, Tim," I added grimly, "that Shirk has started to 'cock up' again, only now he turns the other way so his head is nearer his telephone bell. It's a bit safer, perhaps, Tim. But it's 'cocking up' just

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the same. If Logan ever catches him again, it will be all over. He'll be queered with the company anywhere. And you know what other chance a boy or man has in this town, especially if it becomes known that the railroad company discharged him."

"I am grateful to you, Wally," said Tim quietly. "I won't mention your name. But after tonight the boy won't sleep on the job again." He drew himself up resolutely, and though he said nothing aloud, I knew he had said to himself, "I am the head of my house."

But Tim was getting old, and the inevitable happened. One night Logan failed again to get a reply from his crew-caller's office. He crossed the yard, and found Shirk once more asleep on his desk. He had to shake the boy to get him awake. Next morning Logan reported the case to the superintendent, and Shirk was at once called and discharged.

I disliked to go home that evening, and once in the house I locked myself in. But it was of little use. About eight o'clock came a knock to the back door and there was Tim quietly asking to see me. I brought him in and tried to explain what had happened.

"You see, Tim, it isn't that the boy went to sleep. Everybody gets sleepy and everybody knows it's hard to keep awake and nobody knows it better than Logan himself. But the boy didn't fall asleep in his chair. He 'cocked up' on his desk again — cleaned off all the stuff, wrapped up an old coat for a pillow, and laid himself down as though he didn't have another tap to do all night. It wasn't sleeping at the post, it was premeditated sleeping."

"I understand," said Tim gently. "It isn't that that I came over for. I was wondering would they give the boy one more chance! You remember that Paul had to be struck by lightning before he could become Paul."

"I — don't know if they will, Tim," I stammered. "I might try them."

I did what I could for the boy. I saw Logan and then had a talk with my boss, Schaffer, the trainmaster. He took me in to see Manx, the superintendent. I told Manx chiefly about the boy's lovable old father and the critical sickness of the young wife.

"What sense does he have monkeying with his job when he has a good old dad like that and a sick wife in the house!" Manx demanded savagely.

There was nothing for me to say.

"Well." Manx stared at his desk. "We'll give him another chance. But his job's been filled. About the only thing now until something better turns up will be flagging down at Winter Street. Tell him to be on duty down there at six o'clock tomorrow morning."

I thanked him and left. That evening I reported my little success to Tim.

"Tell Shirk to take the job, and not to be discouraged," I told him. "Manx hinted there would be some-

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thing better for him later. He may even have something in mind now, and may be offering this other job just to try Shirk out."

Tim thanked me with such gentle dignity that I felt fortunate to have been able to be of help to such a man. But somehow I had my doubts about Tim being able to manage much longer the insubordinate member of his house. I was still awake that evening when Shirk came home, likely from movies or pool. He came in the side way. I heard the alleyway gate slam below my open window. In a little while I heard the murmur of Tim's news. Then the boy's voice answered distinctly.

"Me go back to the company flagging like a cripple at twenty-five a month! Not on your life."

"This is only a job to try you, son. The superintendent told Mr. Connor it was," Tim explained.

"I don't care what that fool said. The company got smart and fired me. They can whistle till I come back — anyhow not to flag at a crossing at twenty-five a month."

"But they wouldn't want you back at all as far as they are caring," said Tim. "It was Mr. Connor who was the kind enough neighbor to ask the superintendent to try you again."

"What do you know!" raged the boy. "You never worked outside the shop in your life. I tell you it's Logan who wants to see me flagging down at Winter Street so he can come along and point me out as the fellow he had fired."

"You are blind, son," said Tim clearly. "What does Mr. Logan care about you more than to get out of you as much work as the company pays you for? You have never worked hard enough to make yourself valuable to anybody. The railroad company can get a hundred others glad enough for every job they have to offer you."

"And I can get a hundred other jobs if I want them!" declared Shirk. "You'd be the one to make me flag at a crossing when I could be having a decent job at three times the money."

"You've always had a chance, son," rebuked Tim slowly. "In the morning I'll ask Mr. Conner to report you off sick for two days; that's how long you have to show that you can get another job, a decent one. If you don't get one by Friday night — Saturday morning you start working wherever the railroad company wants you, if it's keeping cows from off the track."

"Saturday morning you'll have nothing more to do with me," returned the boy defiantly. "I'll be of age, and I'll work where I want to and when I want to."

"A boy may be thirty-one and still need a head of his house, son," answered Tim quietly.

"If you're the head of the house, why don't you own it! Why don't you make enough money to feed the people in your house!"

Old Tim was silent. I could imagine his wounded eyes.

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"Why don't you support your house so I don't have to work, if you're the head of it!" jeered the boy. "You, making only a dollar eighty-five a day, trying to boss me — you make me sick."

"You have two days to find a better job in," said Tim gravely. "Then you and I will see who is the head of the house."

Before I was up next morning Tim had asked my mother whether I would please report Shirk off sick for two days — that he, Tim, would explain later. I did as he requested, and spent the remainder of the day wondering what means Tim was going to take if Shirk found no job and still refused to flag. I wondered if Tim would try force. I hoped he wouldn't. Shirk was too big. And he was young, while Tim was starting to wobble. I resolved to stay close by and give the old man help if he needed me.

The evening of Shirk's second day I sat in our sitting-room and tried to read. Though the evening was unusually cool I had the window raised. Through the screen I could see Tim alone with a light in his dining-room, patiently smoking his pipe. Marjy was likely upstairs in bed. Old Tim had told mother early the morning before that her doctor had said that the girl's only chance now was the fresh air, mental diversion, and physical recreation of some sanatorium in the mountains. Tim had mentioned that he was going to try to borrow some money for the trip as soon as Shirk started to work again.

I was wondering how much money the old man would have to scrape together and where he would get it, when I heard someone coming in through the alleyway. The footsteps echoed dully. By the walk I knew it was Shirk, but it wasn't the walk of a man who had just landed a job.

Through my screen I heard the door close behind him. Then I saw father and son confronting each other from across their dining-room table. After a moment Tim turned and pulled down the blind. I was out of it. I couldn't hope to hear through Tim's closed windows. And now the possible danger of the old man began to worry me.

I made up my mind to go boldly over and call. But before I was even up from my chair a shot rang through the loose Mast windows and echoed cavernously in the alleyway.

Other neighbors heard it, too, but I was the nearest. I do not know today whether I scaled the fence or scuttled around by the alleyway. But I remember bursting in old Tim's back door, and I shall never forget that scene in Tim's dining-room.

The house was anything but wide, and this room like ours, chopped off for the alleyway extension, was about ten feet narrow. A few moments before it might have been cheerful. A golden-oak sideboard stood against the wall with its glasses and dishes as neatly arranged as when Mrs. Tim was alive. Drawn up cosily to the table were two of the half-dozen golden-oak chairs. The table was

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covered with a cheerful red cloth. Beside the white of the few dishes and the yellow of Tim's old pipe, the cloth looked bright red. But it seemed hopelessly faded where its corners dragged the floor beside the rich wine color that stained the face and hair of Shirk. He lay on the carpet quiet except for an almost imperceptible ooze from the ugly dark hole where his hair and temple met.

I don't remember what I first stammered to the old man. I only recall a fervent prayer to myself that I might see Shirk get to his feet and sneer familiarly into my face. But, except for the trickle of blood down his temple, there was nothing about the boy that moved. I tried to imagine what had happened. Somehow I had no idea that old Tim had done it until he straightened up from the floor and laid an old blue revolver on the red cloth. I could not help shrinking from him, but I pitied from the bottom of me his dazed gray eyes and shaking fingers.

"He said I wasn't the head of the house," old Tim faltered. "I had to show him I was." He drew a breath almost quietly. "I had to show him."

"But, Tim, you didn't do it — not with that!"

He nodded faintly.

"Even in self-defense, Tim! A thing like that! Was he killing you?"

"No," said Tim slowly, shaking his head. "I didn't have to do it in self-defense."

"Then for God's sake don't tell anybody," I flung at him. "Don't say a word until I get you a lawyer."

A moment more and the kitchen and sitting-room doorways were crowded with frightened neighbors' faces. Later came the police and to the first question asked him Tim replied: "He said I wasn't the head of the house — and I had to show him."

"Tim!" I whispered in his ear, shaking his shoulder, "for God's sake keep your mouth shut."

The police took him away and after tearing myself from knotted neighbors, I went down to the railroad and told Logan the story. Logan was tremendously affected and seemed to take some of the blame on himself. He gave me a card to an attorney friend of his named Munson and told me to engage him — that he would pay the bill. The next morning I reported off and was waiting in the lawyer's office before he came in. I found him a ready listener. But when I had finished telling him the case and everything I knew, he shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but your old man's got no case at all unless we change his story. A man has no legal right, you know, to kill his son in order to make him accept this or any other job."

"But there's something wrong somewhere," I stammered. "Tim is one of the finest, gentlest souls in the world. He would never hurt a fly without cause."

"What do you mean by cause? There isn't much cause in law except self-defense."

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"I believe it *was* self-defense," I muttered.

"Your defendant doesn't seem to support you," said Munson thoughtfully. "I think we had better go down and get his version."

We readily gained admittance to Tim's cell, and I encouraged Tim to trust his new friend with everything.

"As I'm to be your counsel," explained Munson earnestly, "I must know everything just as it happened. It doesn't say that I will tell everything I know. But I cannot and dare not make a defense for you until I am assured that the prosecution will have no vital facts that I don't know."

"The only way, Tim," I urged again, "is to tell everything."

Tim nodded and then repeated merely what he had related to me the night before.

"You cannot convince me that you used a revolver on your son without more cause than that," insisted Munson clearly. "It's ridiculous. Tell me every step, please, just as it happened."

"He was only home a few moments," insisted Tim. "There is nothing more to tell."

"But I want to know every word that was said, every move you both made. Don't you realize, man, that you may hang for this if you do not tell me what I have every right and reason to know in order to try to save you?"

Old Tim bent forward helplessly.

"There was nothing else. If I must hang for it, they must hang me. I am sorry, Wally, for the neighborhood — and for Marjy. How is Marjy?"

"Mother has her over at our place," I told him. "She is not much better."

Before we left, Munson tried again to force some reasonable explanation from the old man's lips. But Tim could add nothing to his story. We gave up at last and went to Munson's office, where he summed up Tim's best defense. Briefly, it was that the boy Shirk had resisted Tim, his father, as I had heard him do before, and that old Tim because of his advancing years had used the revolver to threaten — and it had gone off against his will, partially turning his mind.

In due time the case came to trial. But it was a losing fight, with Tim unmanageable as he had been from the first. To his own disaster and to the frenzy of Munson he repeated twice to the jury, "My son said I was not the head of the house — and I had to show him I was. I had to show him!" The only satisfaction we had was in the fact that the prosecution was able to force no more from Tim than had Munson or I.

They sentenced old Tim for life and as soon afterward as I could I went to see him. He tried to smile to me as I came in, but it was only a wistful, forlorn twist that threatened every moment to turn to tears. I did my best to cheer him and was glad that I had news from Marjy, who had gone to a sanatorium in the mountains.

"Mother got a letter from Marjy

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today," I told him. "Marjy says she and the baby are getting better every day and will be down to see you soon. She says it was the mountains and nothing else that helped her."

"Thank God," muttered Tim, closing his eyes. His lips moved silently. To me they seemed to form words that could only make strange meaning.

"Tim," I demanded, an incredible assumption working in my brain, "what have you known all this time that you haven't told us!"

Tim opened his eyes and wiped them tremblingly with the freckled back of his hand.

"Nothing, Wally," he muttered.

I was sure now that I had struck a trail.

I caught hold of his shoulder.

"Tell me, Tim," I urged. "Trust me! I'll say nothing to anybody. Sit down. You're weak, man! You're sick!"

But he stubbornly kept standing.

"You promise — never to breathe a word — till I'm gone?" he questioned closely.

"I promise, Tim." I held up my right hand. For a moment he seemed to falter.

"Oh, Wally," he sobbed, breaking down and blinking the tears from his old gray eyes. "Did you never guess when you stood by me so hard? The poor, headstrong laddy. He couldn't help it. He came from other stock than we."

"Couldn't help what, Tim!"

"For two days he tried for his job, but everybody refused him," pleaded Tim. "He came home that night so blue. The poor soul, Wally. If he hadn't been blue, he wouldn't have done it — before I could get to him. My revolver was in the sideboard drawer, under the red napkins. He knew it, and till I got to him it was too late."

"Tim!" I demanded of him, amazed. "Why have you been lying to us, to everybody, as you have?"

Tim's eyes entreated me.

"The document!" he reminded. "It's written there that if the policyholder takes his life, no money will be paid until it's a year after the insurance was taken out. And for the boy it was only seven months. What would Marjy have done? I hadn't even a dollar to give her to go away. And she had to go."

"But, Tim, Tim!" I faltered bewilderingly. "Why didn't you say then that Shirk *attacked you* — that you had to do it in self-defense? You might have saved the insurance and yourself besides."

Old Tim squared his unsteady shoulders and stood gently erect.

"I take care of my children, Wally," he said, "the dead as well as the living. I am the head of my house."

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THE DOOR KEY

by FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

JASON WAS SHAKING OPEN HIS lantern when he turned to listen. The door opened and Oliver Armiston came in. Oliver had been watching for the light across the long meadow. Parr, the police deputy, had telephoned that he was coming up on the late train, which meant cooning, eeling, or bullheading. The great manhunter craved such diversions when brain-weary. Probably he had just brought to a successful termination another of those sleepless vigils which the papers report naively as "the police have obtained a confession," and wanted something to make him remember how to go to sleep.

It couldn't be cooning — the only coon dog in town belonged to Percy Manchester, the local bad man, and Percy was in jail; they might borrow Percy for the night, but they would have to put him back before daylight, which might be inconvenient. There would be too much moon, also too much water, for spearing eels. All of which meant bullheading at Messenger Pond. This was a matter of sitting up all night in a leaky boat, incased, for warmth, in a none-too-particular horse blanket; and whiling away the gooseflesh hours persuading frozen worms to conform their outlines to the curvature of a No. 6 bass hook; and then arguing with a horned bullhead which would, of course, swallow the hook before consenting to be dragged into the boat. It didn't impress Oliver as art, but he was loyal, and he would stand by; at least to the extent of holding the lantern while Jason dug bait. Jason, however, was delighted. Parr was one of those unfortunates who never relaxed, no matter how much he prided himself on so doing; and to sit up all night with the manhunter on a lonely pond was, to Jason, an inestimable privilege.

"As soon as I get my chores done," said Jason — his eyes swung around to the key on the table, and he said suddenly, "I got to do his too!"

"Whose?" asked Oliver, picking up the key. He hadn't heard of anyone's front door being locked. One usually did hear of a thing like that almost before the key was turned. He balanced it on his fingers — he didn't place the key. During his several summers up here he had acquired an almost heraldic knowledge of his neighbors' door keys.

"Ensign Belding's," said Jason, his eyes narrowing.

Oliver looked up, surprised. He put down the key.

"I thought Ensign Belding lived off the country," he said with a dry smile. "I didn't know he soiled his hands with chores."

Jason held open the door for Oliver and the cat to go out in the yard.

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"He's milking one cow lately," said Jason vaguely. "She comes over here sometimes. I send her back home with Shep."

"Since when have you two asked favors of each other?" asked Armiston.

"Never," said Jason laconically. He moved across the dooryard to the bars where Shep had the cows waiting; cattle that regarded their approach with looks of gentle reproof. "But that's his key," said Jason. "He must have gone off again." He let down the bars, and the cattle filed in, counted by Shep. "He must have gone in a hurry," said Jason, scratching his head, "else he wouldn't have left his key with me."

There was something inviolable about a key. It meant creatures to be cared for, not petty human differences to be raked over. Ensign Belding didn't spend much time here. It was only the neap tides that brought him back home. But even at these low ebbs of fortune, he still thought himself too much of a gentleman for his old neighbors. One meets out in the world now and then some very devil of a small-town fellow; one wonders what he was as a boy in a country community, and how, amid his cattle and rustics, he acquired his slick sophistication. One wonders more what he still is when he goes creeping back home to lick his wounds. This Ensign Belding would be gone for months, for years. Usually, when he came back, it happened at night; and smoke issuing from the chimney of the stone house on the hill back of the tannery would first apprise the countryside that the owner was in residence, so to speak.

"Has he been alone this time?" asked Oliver, with the rather meticulous intonation of one ashamed to find himself prying into the affairs of a man apart. Oliver sat in the doorway, watching the gorgeousness of coming evening: the iridescent first stars breaking through the purple of the sky, and the deepening sepia of the shadows at the edge of the wood. The moon would rise early.

"I don't know," said Jason softly. He drove milk tumultuously into the resounding bucket. The cows nosed their grain, pulled at wisps of hay, danced little solo steps in the litter; the ties clattered musically and the air hung heavy with the aroma of warm milk. Outside, the maidens and fat matrons listened wistfully as they chewed on dry cuds.

"Where does he get the cash to go away with?" asked Armiston. "He's always stony broke when he comes home. That's the only reason he comes back, isn't it?"

"I'll show you, if you'll come over with me," said Jason mysteriously. He moved methodically through the milking, not straight down the line, but in an irregular way, like the firing order of an eight-cylinder engine — there is a certain prestige in a herd, rank must be observed. Soon the separator was whining and pigs squealing and the barn calves thumping buckets, and the cows who had given up

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their rich burdens sedately withdrew and joined their barren sisters in the barnyard. It was dark in the shadows when they started down the lane to short-cut across the Belding meadow. Shep suddenly ran ahead. It was the little heifer, come over to visit again, standing wistful and lonesome against the bars.

"Here's part of his chores right here!" laughed Jason. "Leave her be, Shep. I'll milk her out on the grass."

He squatted beside the timid creature, but arose at once, muttering angrily. Her quarters were badly caked; she flinched when he touched her. He put her in the barn, stancheled her, and fed and watered and made friends with her; and carefully kneading the udder, he managed to strip her.

"There ought to be a law!" muttered Jason as they started down the lane again. They climbed the wall and went around the hill through the woods, Shep pattering at heel and the swinging lantern calling up a troupe of shadows. They came on the stone house from the rear. There was a light in the kitchen window.

"I won't go in," said Oliver, hanging back.

"Wait for me here," said Jason.

Shortly Jason returned.

"There is no one there," he said. "Come on; I want to show you something."

It had been a pretentious house, and it still wore the air. The long living-room, almost empty of even makeshift furniture, was in an advanced stage of deliberate destruction. The mantel had been taken out entirely and only the yawning chimney hole remained to stare accusingly on the desolation. It had been a quaint old piece, that mantel, with carved awning to which clung sooty cupids ardently climbing upward through vines and fig leaves to a shaky temple of love built not on a rock, nor yet on sand, but on a swaying bough. The whole had been brought bit by bit from the Cape by ox cart by one of the early Beldings, who, feeling the oats of prosperity, had bethought himself to go back to Hyannis for the old lares and penates which had been left behind as too bulky to swim the Connecticut River withal.

"Ensign knows his onions," remarked Jason with a smile. He nodded at the wrecked chimney and the fresh plaster on the floor. "You'll find that in some Madison Avenue antique shop before the winter."

He paused, staring down at the print of a high-heeled sandal in the dust. Then he hadn't been alone this time.

The same tale was told all over the house. First, the furniture had gone, bit by bit, probably skimmed from the top down. Then an informed vandal, learned in the wants of antiques for the trade, had taken the interior to pieces. Worn threshold sills, hewn beams, door-post capitals, heaven-help-us hinges and escutcheon plates, lintels, pilasters, paneling, mopboard moldings, stair rails, even the odd bevel of a window box. It had

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all been picked out carefully by someone who, as Jason said, knew his onions. This fellow hadn't come creeping back to lick his wounds; he had come back for nuggets, to dig deeper and deeper into this storehouse of unconsidered trifles of Colonial utility, which, through the ironic orientation of taste that feeds the antique trade, had become, in the eyes of beholders, *objets de vertu*. Door sills worn hollow, with polished nail heads protruding — it was the tread of vanished feet that left the veneer of cost for the collector. The door sill must be hollow, or you are distinctly parvenu.

There was a note on the kitchen table, held down by the lamp. It read:

My dear Jason: I can't imagine myself ever chasing this cow again for her milk. Take her, my boy, as a gift from me, in appreciation of your thoughtfulness in keeping off the place while I am in residence. Please blow out the lamp.

E. B.

Jason put down the note, puzzled.

"I wonder what he wants," he pondered. He looked about the kitchen. He touched the stove. It was chilled, and already damp with the dew of evening; it hadn't held a fire for hours.

"Why didn't he leave that note with the key?" asked Jason. "There are no chores. Why bring me over here?"

"To blow out the lamp," suggested Oliver, with a smile.

"Why light the lamp?"

"To bring you over here to blow it out," said Oliver. "Do your duty, and let's dig bait."

"Look about, first," urged Jason. "There is something he wants me to see; else he wouldn't have worked about in a circle. You don't know Ensign. The only thing he'd give me is a pestilence," he explained, his lip curling.

They moved from room to room, Shep casually sniffing at rat holes, but not otherwise interested. It was certain the place was deserted. Jason blew out the lamp and turned the key in the lock.

"Did you ever do him a favor before?" asked Armiston. These people at times had such singular ways.

"No," said Jason shortly. He looked back in perplexity. "I'm inclined to think I've done him one now — but for the life of me I can't figure out what it is."

They found tire tracks in the drive, with the print of a woman's high-heeled sandal to show where she had stepped into the car. The tracks were lost in the hard road, and it was impossible to tell which way Belding had gone.

— It was nearing midnight. The three fishermen sat hunched in their horse blankets in that attitude of dogged expectation which only their tribe can achieve. Talk, the hushed, guarded interchange of conspirators who fear eavesdroppers, had for the moment died down. Pipes glowed, but there was no movement. The

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wind was gone, and there was no sense of mobile water. Parr was conscious of a pleasing languor which, if not disturbed by some inquisitive bullhead, would very shortly take complete possession of his senses. After all, fishing is not for fish. It is a good deal like gazing into a crystal ball. It soothes the attention, it shuts out ulterior sights and sounds, and after a while, if persisted in religiously, it achieves perfect Lethe. The great manhunter was brain-weary, too tired to sleep. The silence was lulling him. Late frosts had stilled the cicada and those other whispery voices of night which are always present as an undertone in the growing season. Now they were too far from shore to catch even the rustlings of the forest. The occasional lazy turn of some fish too near the surface was the only disturbance. Parr nodded.

"Here they come now," said Jason softly, as if speaking out of a dream.

"Who?" demanded Oliver. The boat stirred momentarily as their thoughts came to life.

"Listen," cautioned Jason from the depths of his blanket.

The prow of a canoe drifted ghostily out of the blanket of mists that clung to the surface of the pond, and came to a stop alongside, with soft thumping of gunwales.

"'Lo!"

"'Lo!"

There was a general exchange of muted grunts, like the "How" of so many chiefs in solemn council. It was Orlo Sage, the town Pooh-Bah; the second tattered figure resolved itself into none other than Uncle Charlie. The two were inseparable; especially when the town constable was exercising his official functions. Whose avuncular connection he was had long since been forgotten; the whole town — man, boy, and woman — knew him by that appellation.

"What were you two doing over to Ensign's?" asked Orlo.

"Did you see our tracks?" asked Jason quickly.

"Yeah," said Orlo. Oliver tried to think what tracks they could have left that would be so readily readable by night. Another pause. Parr shifted, unhooded himself.

"Well, what of it?" demanded Jason.

"Nothing," Orlo hastened to say. "Only we didn't know Ensign had gone off again."

"Did you want him?"

"No."

"How'd you know he'd gone off?"

"We just been fishing his car out of the river."

To Armiston the essential fact was that the car had to be fished out of the river. Not so with Jason.

He said, surprised: "I didn't know he had a car!"

"Neither did we, till we fished it out," admitted Orlo.

"What makes you think it's his?" asked Jason.

"Remember that carved awning on the mantel his gran'ther fetched up from the Cape?" asked Orlo.

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"That was tangled up in the steering wheel when we got the car out."

"Maybe the car belonged to the woman," suggested Jason. "She might have come up after him."

"No, I don't think so," said Uncle Charlie. "At least, she wasn't doing the driving."

They had not overlooked the print of that high-heeled sandal in the soft mud of the driveway, nor the fact that it was on the right side of the car.

Parr suddenly exclaimed, in some exasperation, "Well, are they dead? Were they drowned?"

"No," said Orlo, disgusted. "If they were, that would end it. They'd be out to sea by now. No one ever went into that river when it was in flood whose body was ever found again. What worries me is why they rolled their car down the hill sixty miles an hour into the mill race."

"Maybe they couldn't help themselves," suggested Oliver.

"They didn't try!" cried Orlo. "They weren't in it!"

"How do you know that? Did you see them?" It was Parr who snapped out the question.

"I didn't need to," said Orlo. "I saw the car after we fished it out. Any fool would know enough to put on brakes, if he had them. Wouldn't he? Well, Ensign had brakes! But he didn't use them. He ain't the one to commit suicide!"

Man can, within the limits of the free will that has been vouchsafed him, like a calf on a tether, decide exactly what he will do in a certain contingency — and do it. But meantime he is surrounded by fellow creatures who are tugging at their own stake chains of volition; what they are going to do, in the fourth-dimensional area called time, to coincide unwittingly with his plans, cannot be foreseen, and can only be guarded against within the region of a gambler's choice. Ensign Belding did not know that Orlo, of all persons in the town, having finished the more pressing of his Fall work, was taking the day off to draw a wagonload of milk cans filled with nine-inch trout from the hatchery to put in the river. This was a methodical horse-drawn job, requiring the use of the old and almost abandoned West Street road. Else Ensign would not have chosen this day to leave his front-door key with Jason.

Orlo picked up Uncle Charlie on the way over. It was an all-day job, behind horses that walked three miles an hour. Not a moment dragged. Every so often these two managed to go at a walk over every road in town, no matter how remote. And it was what they observed on these trips that made their administration of the law, as it came down to their fellow citizenry, so mild and unburdensome a thing. Parr, the manhunter of the metropolis, taking his quantum of sunshine on the Avenue, with an unseen scout ahead and an unseen scout behind, performed much the same office for his constituents.

At the foot of Pray's Hill, by the

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old silk mill, abandoned fifty years gone by, but still standing foursquare to wind and weather, they pulled up short and stared. Ensign's car had taken the curve at the base at what must have been locomotive speed. It mowed off the posts of the guard rail as if by some gigantic bush scythe. The river was at flood, and the turgid waters of the old tail race boiled with swirling eddies.

Orlo and Uncle Charlie got down without haste. This thing had happened hours before. Yet, in spite of the irresistible force that had snipped off the fence posts, there was a tameness about the wheel tracks of this madly rushing car where they crossed the soft shoulders of the road.

"The wheels weren't locked," observed Orlo.

"Better empty the trout first," advised Uncle Charlie.

They carried the forty-quart cans, one by one, to the race and completely submerged them before upending them. Even if Ensign were pinned under the car in the river, haste would not help him now, and these two practical messengers first attended to their trout. When the last can was emptied, they took ax, crowbar, and chain; they never traveled without these tools, with which they were more versatile than a burglar with his jimmy. They first cut a pole in the woods and punched the boiling waters of the race. The car hadn't traveled far after it struck the water. They located it on the bottom and got the chain around it; and, urging the team into its collars, they had it out on the bank. They had no doubt whose it was when they saw the mantel awning.

"There is a sharp curve at the foot of the hill," put in Parr, who had forgotten bullheads and his craving for sleep. Orlo nodded.

"Someone must have steered around the curve," said Parr.

"They did," agreed Orlo.

"And got out at sixty miles an hour?"

"They got out," admitted Orlo, unruffled.

"That sounds like bareback stuff," remarked Parr, with just a trace of sarcasm. "Must have been the lady."

"No," said Orlo blandly. "He was doing the driving."

"But how?" persisted the police deputy. He was a hundred miles from his own bailiwick, but he was taking charge. And furthermore, Orlo and Uncle Charlie were reporting to him, and to him only.

"He went out on a limb," said Orlo.

"At sixty miles an hour?" said Parr incredulously. "Was he an acrobat?"

"He was," said the imperturbable Orlo. "I'll show you the limb. And I'll show you a hunk of skin he ripped off his arm!"

"Who is this Ensign Belding?" demanded the deputy.

They told him what they knew. It was not much. They were surprised themselves at how little they really knew of Ensign. The police deputy nodded thoughtfully over the story.

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"It's a getaway, of some sort," he said softly. He turned to Orlo. "He just came back occasionally to hide, didn't he?"

Orlo shook his head, perplexed, and looked at Uncle Charlie. He had never thought of Ensign as being in hiding when he was here. It was possible. It was even a brilliant conception, all things considered. Oliver was thinking, what an odd twist it would be if this fellow, for all his bad manners and pin-money antiques, should really turn out to be some big fish in Parr's world — bandit, thug, sharper, gambler — if he should be uncovered because he forgot to set the brakes for the sharp eyes of a rustic constable — or because Parr himself happened to be going by. Such things are what crooks call breaks. Breaks keep the jails full.

"He has faked a drowning, of course," said Parr. "The body never would have turned up — if there had been a body. The torrent of the river in flood would have taken care of that.

"It is not life insurance," went on the deputy. He had the trick of classifying human beings by category; filing human foibles by card-index system. Fake drownings usually are life-insurance frauds. Hundreds of original thinkers every year conceive the brilliant idea of pretending to be lost by drowning, so they won't have to produce their own dead body to collect. The idea is *passé*, but they don't know it.

"He has played out his string," said Parr, falling into the argot. "He is making a getaway, so he can turn up as somebody else. Let's go look!"

He took down his rod; Jason drew in the anchor, and Oliver slipped in the thole pins. They moved off through the blanket of cottony mist, on whose surface, chest high, the moon played a silvery light. When the prows unerringly found shore through some ghostly knowledge of their own, Orlo lifted up his voice in the plaint of a tree toad — a tree toad sadly out of season — yet a second answered from somewhere in the gloaming, and Percy Manchester, the town bad man, and his wonderful coon dog stepped out, shivering with dread, into the moonlight. Orlo had taken him out of jail and brought him along, thinking they might need the dog.

An hour later, Parr, studying a thumbprint through a magnifying glass, was describing it by telephone. He was rather rusty on this science, having delegated it, among his multitudinous functions, to men of science who had time to make a life-work of it. Nevertheless, like the youthful de Maupassant differentiating between seemingly identical stones under the guidance of Flaubert, his master, the police deputy did convey in words the salients of these whorls and apices in such a manner as to isolate them from every other thumbprint in the world since the dawn of time. There is nothing on earth identical with any other thing, to the eye taught to observe.

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A voice in far-off Centre Street, headquarters of the New York police, said quite audibly to all in the hushed kitchen:

"Shall I call you back, sir, or will you hold the wire?"

"I'll hold the wire," said Parr.

They waited.

"This stuff," said Parr, of the thumbprint of Ensign Belding, "is not so difficult as you might think." With the point of a pencil he traced the lines. "If he has ever been fingerprinted, it is only necessary to look in the right pigeonhole. There is a process of elimination that gradually narrows down. We haven't a clearing house for the whole country yet. We will have some day. But we cops," he added, his little eyes twinkling, "collect choice specimens among ourselves. We add to our collection by swapping back and forth, like we used to swap birds' eggs and postage stamps when we were boys. I have a notion he may be a choice one," he added vaguely. The big fellow nodded. He had been sleepless for upward of three days. With an effort he gave heed to the phone.

"It is Chappie Van Sittart," said the voice at the other end.

"Well! Well!" cried Parr, beaming on the company. "It's Chappie Van Sittart! He is an acrobat, Orlo, I grant you!"

The name meant nothing to them — not even to Oliver. If they had hived in the Ritz, at White Sulphur or Deauville, or ever made a smoking-room passage on a four-day boat, they would have heard of this elegant athlete, lady killer, gambler. It was his forte so to involve his victims that they couldn't complain. He talked a good deal of his honor, and freely offered satisfaction to anyone who wanted it. But such was his prowess that the point was never pressed. There had never been a formal charge sustained against him, but his career was such that Parr had caused him to be brought in occasionally for the morning line-up, so his bright young men could file the handsome face for future reference. Parr laughed.

"I never suspected he was a local product," he said. "You ought to be proud of him!" He turned to the phone. "Do we want him?"

Apparently not. The voice said casually he would ask Chicago and Washington and Asheville — it was the fashionable hour at Asheville just now, and that is where Chappie would most likely be wanted, if at all. Unless, as Parr had suggested in the boat, the man had run out his string in this line, and wasn't following the migratory swells this Fall. While he waited, Parr made pencil markings on the table; his heavy eyelids drooped, fell lower and lower, closed; he slumped over the table, his head pillowed on his arms, and he was sound asleep. Jason softly got up and fed the fire. Silence reigned. The big fellow slept and it was not etiquette to withdraw. They were frankly disappointed. Now that it turned out that their neighbor was the glamorous Chappie Van Sittart, important

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enough to come under the cognizance of the great Mr. Parr, they would have liked to have him do something worthy of his fame. Pushing an automobile overboard was not a heinous crime. It is being done every day to ease the used-car market. Jason grinned. After a time the telephone dangling at Parr's elbow babbled incoherently. Jason picked it up and gave heed. The voice said there didn't seem to be anything; no one in police circles had any immediate call for Chappie. Sorry.

"All right; I'll tell him," said Jason.

Armiston pushed back his chair to rise, when the door softly opened, and the agitated face of Percy, the town bad man, appeared. He craftily examined the interior. Percy was always suffering delicious apprehensions for the imaginary feats of crime he had executed. Every now and then — as now — Orlo locked him up just to soothe his vanity. Orlo stepped to the door and bent down. Percy whispered. He had followed Ensign's tracks from the top of the hill over to the Hollow on the east branch of the little river. There he had lost them in the hard road.

"Was anybody with him?"

The bad man shook his head.

"How did he go?"

"Walked."

He probably caught a bus; there were dozens of them. Well, thought Orlo, good riddance for all time.

"What's that?" said Orlo, cocking an ear.

A distant murmur was on the night wind. Percy whispered. His dog had three coons in a tree, in the apple orchard on the mountain. He eyed Orlo apprehensively. Orlo let himself out, and when he was wholly out, he turned and beckoned to the others. They joined him. It was *lèse-majesté* to abandon the big fellow, but no one dared to awaken him. They slunk off into the shadows, led by Percy, who now and again raised his voice in the plaintive peep of a tree toad, to keep them at his heels in the dark. Ahead and away up on the mountain, the dog barked dismally, urging them to hurry, hurry. . . .

Morel, the fashion plate, who, with little Pelts, the shabby, formed the close-fitting shadow that never left the deputy, night or day, placed before his chief two photographs. One was a rogues' gallery likeness of Chappie Van Sittart; a truly handsome fellow even under these unflattering conditions. The other was a rotogravure likeness from a Sunday newspaper of Captain Boylin-Eckford, snapped by some press hound at Palm Beach. After Parr had studied them, Morel took them away, and in their place laid two enlargements; of the face in each case. To these portraits he applied a pair of calipers, with which he made certain esoteric comparisons. Physiognomists, and especially anthropologists, study and differentiate among human heads in much the same way as Parr studied and indicated the

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points of variance in that fingerprint he sent by telephone. No two faces are alike and no one will ever be mistaken for another when subjected to Morel's calipers. However, parenthetically, few of us carry calipers.

"It sounds good," agreed Parr. He had great admiration for Morel, who had spent two years abroad in Bertillon work.

"I'd like to send our own photographer down there to get a full face and a better three-quarters," said Morel.

So it happened that a fortunate photographer was given a Palm Beach vacation. Weeks later satisfactory photographs arrived of Captain Boylin-Eckford at play. These views, being duly subjected to calipers, were filed with the Van Sittart *dossier* until such time as the migratory swells started north. They would pause at Beaufort, James River, White Sulphur, and Asheville. But eventually they got back to town, sun-bronzed, in time to shop for the spring flight to London.

One afternoon, at the Sherry Netherlands, Morel, in an afternoon costume that might have been meant for one of the walking gentlemen in charge, tapped Captain Boylin-Eckford politely on the shoulder as he sat at table with his elegant friends. The captain shivered with irritated apprehension and turned an angry face on Morel.

"Don't do that, I beg of you!" he commanded crisply. "What is it, fellow?"

Morel said, not moving his lips, but with perfect manners, that the captain's car waited at the curb on the street side. The British officer considered for a moment; he arose, still cogitating; he bowed deprecatingly to his friends and followed Morel out. Such things are bores, but they require attention. It was not a captain's car but a police car, as he saw at a glance. They drove downtown.

"What do they want now?" demanded the irritated officer, who seemed to know how to take this sort of thing philosophically. Morel shook his head, smiling — he was merely the messenger boy.

He took the Britisher in to Parr. There was nothing about the trappings to suggest a jail. It was like the office of a businessman — a big one.

"Well, Captain!" said the deputy, with a specious geniality that probably would not last long. The captain bowed and waited.

"Or Mr. Van Sittart, if you prefer," said Parr amiably.

The philosophical gentleman shrugged a graceful shoulder.

"Or Ensign Belding, if you like that better!" said Parr, a bark to his tones and a glitter in his eye.

Ensign Belding was not prepared for that, as he was for the other. He blanched. He even took a step backward, made to feel for the knob of the door behind him, before he recollected himself. He shook his head, recovering his *sang-froid*.

"No, I am afraid not, sir," he said.

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Parr opened a drawer and took out a door key — Ensign Belding's front-door key — and placed it on the blotter before him. Ensign Belding's eyes followed the act as if magnetized. It seemed impossible to drag his gaze from that key.

"So," said Parr easily. "Draw back your sleeve. Let me see your left arm."

The prisoner flinched; his easy athletic poise grew swiftly tense. It was Morel who took his left arm and with a single gesture pulled up the sleeve, revealing the deep scar of a torn muscle, just above the wrist.

"You follow me now, don't you?" asked the deputy. He motioned to a chair. "Sit down and think it over," he said. Parr looked at him as though he were a piece of wood. The prisoner felt his palate go dry, his fingers closed convulsively; and it was only by a great exertion of his will that he prevented his eyes from shutting — that primordial gesture of utter despair. He was a brave man ordinarily. He had steeled himself against this sort of thing; he could carry it off magnificently, as a rule. But when they dragged back his sleeve to lay bare that livid scar — when they called him Ensign Belding — and that key ——

"Sit down," said Parr; and he obeyed, trying, between shame and desperation, to get hold of himself, to recover his poise. Actually it was a shame to think they could disarm him with a single word. But here was Parr at his elbow.

Parr was saying, in a low impersonal tone: "What do you want to do, eh? Do you want to go through with it from beginning to end? Or do you want to take a plea and cut out the agony? You are somebody now, as Captain Boylin-Eckford. Your new crowd hasn't got on to you yet." Parr's tone was still as smooth as a purring cat. "I can put you away as Ensign Belding, and no one will be the wiser. You'll get maybe twenty years, ten off for good behavior, and a chance with the soft-headed parole board. Then you can come out like a new penny and start all over from scratch." Parr stopped. The man was kneading his knuckles white, bowing his head under the words. If it hadn't been for the ironic certainty in the tones, he might have cried out, put on his magnificent manner. But there was no uncertainty. Parr knew what he was talking about. Parr winked at Morel, and Morel moved his head in a barely perceptible affirmation.

"If you want to take a chance on a first-degree charge," said Parr, his eyes narrowing and his tones harder, "go to it! I admit I'm not sure we can make a first-degree charge stick. But I'll bet you the rope around your neck that you won't get less than manslaughter. If you stick out for it, I promise you will get the works. If you take a plea, you will get the minimum sentence. Think it over."

There was another pause. Parr took his eyes off the man now, to lessen the tension. Ensign Belding wetted

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his lips. He picked with shaky fingers some imaginary lint on his beautifully tailored sleeve. He began to speak, painfully at first, but gaining some courage at the sound of his own voice.

"I seem — to be here — under some horrible misconception — as to my identity," he said, looking timidly at Morel as if the error lay, quite excusably, with him. "You speak of a plea and manslaughter — and first degree — and" — he paused, to hearten himself — "you speak of a rope about my neck — as if I had committed some heinous, abysmal crime — as if I had m-murdered my brother — whereas I am merely a poor miscast devil of a cardsharp, trying to pick a living — God knows it is precarious enough — out of a parcel of idiots suffering from overstuffing of wealth. It is useless to deny it. You know me for what I am. But as for this m-murder — this scar on my wrist —" He pushed back the sleeve and stared at the scar.

"Maybe you'd like to see what we've got pickled in alcohol in there," said Parr carelessly, jerking a thumb over his shoulder.

The hectic spot of color that had crept into the lost man's cheeks as some measure of courage flowed again was suddenly washed out. He became a rigid automaton, watching Parr. Parr knew everything.

"Ensign," said Parr, "you know the electric lights went out that evening. Or maybe you don't know it! They did. You thought, when you lifted yourself out of the car on that limb, and sent your lady fair crashing through the fence into the river — you thought she would be carried out to sea — and that would be the last you'd ever see of her. Well, she wasn't carried out to sea!" snarled Parr, rising. "Ensign, something stopped the turbines at the electric-light plant down the river that night. What do you suppose it was? They had to shut down and dig it out, bit by bit. Come!" he cried with a sudden ferocity, and he seized the man by both arms and dragged him to his feet. "Come! Let me show you!"

But Ensign Belding, fighting with the strength of frenzy, shrieked, "No! No! No! Never! I did it! I did it, yes. But I — I can't look!"

Parr loosed his hold. "Why — why did you do it?" demanded the deputy. "What did she ever do to you?"

"She followed me there! She threatened to expose me! She was desperate! There was nothing I could do to silence her — nothing but that!"

He covered his face with his hands and fell back in his chair.

"Take him away," said Parr.

When the door shut, Parr moved a large screen. Behind it at a table two men had been sitting — one a stenographer, the other, Oliver Armiston. The stenographer arose, put his sheets in order, and, with a bow to the deputy, walked out, closing the door.

"The electric lights didn't go out that night, Parr," said Oliver.

"I know it," said Parr.

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Oliver looked frightened.

"But the bones ——"

"What bones?" asked Parr.

"Why, the stuff you said they dug out of the wheel — the stuff you offered to show him when he began to shriek ——"

"There are no bones, Oliver," said Parr.

"No murdered woman?"

"Not that we have ever been able to find," said the deputy. "I took a long chance. The shot went home." He shrugged. "Well, that's one rascal out of the way for the rest of his natural life," he said. "Oliver," he cried suddenly, "the only sign of a woman we were ever able to materialize in this whole affair was, first, that footprint in the sitting-room, and, second, the footprint in the driveway where she stepped into the car. She never got out of that car. Recollect?"

"Yes," breathed Oliver. "Yes!"

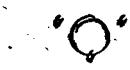
It was true. Except for those two footprints, they never found another vestige of the woman that night.

"We made inquiries," said Parr. "It was her car. She was one of his old gang. She has never been seen since that night. She had something on him; she had him with his back to the wall. Oliver, is there any doubt in your mind that he killed her or how he did it?"

"No, I have just heard him confess," cried Armiston, bewildered. "But, Parr, if he hadn't broken down, if he hadn't confessed — if he had said, 'All right, let me see what you've got pickled in alcohol.' What then? What would you have done?"

"Nothing," said the deputy. He laughed harshly. "I'd have turned him loose! What else could I have done? You can't convict a murderer, no matter what you believe, on the strength of a couple of footprints. Were you watching him? When did he break?"

"When you put that key on the table," said Armiston. He shivered slightly, as from a draft. He was thinking of that cant line, "The police obtained a confession"; he wondered how many newspaper readers, over their morning coffee, had any conception of the drama behind those words — how, in this instance, the mere sight of a key — the key to his own front door — was sufficient to start a train of thought that left the victim helpless and pleading for mercy.



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SEED OF DEMOCRACY

Rex Stout once gave Vincent Starrett a list of ten mystery novels which Mr. Stout considered, at that time, the "ten best detective stories." Of course, we all realize the futility of trying to establish, by poll or otherwise, the real *ten best — of detective stories or anything else. But here, as they appear in Vincent Starrett's* BOOKS AND BIPEDS (*Argus, 1947*), *are Rex Stout's original nominations:*

Wilkie Collins's THE MOONSTONE
Dashiell Hammett's THE MALTESE FALCON
S. S. Van Dine's THE BENSON MURDER CASE
Dorothy L. Sayers's and
Robert Eustace's THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE
G. K. Chesterton's THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN
H. C. Bailey's CALL MR. FORTUNE
Frances Noyes Hart's THE BELLAMY TRIAL
Freeman Wills Crofts's THE CASK
Agatha Christie's THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD
Michael Innes's LAMENT FOR A MAKER

Rex Stout does not remember when he first compiled this list. But when we asked him if these original selections still constituted his true 'tec taste, Mr. Stout studied his choices and decided to make certain substitutions and additions. Here, then, in alphabetical order according to author's name, are the detective stories which, at the time of this writing, Mr. Stout honestly considers "the ten best" of all time:

Eric Ambler's A COFFIN FOR DIMITRIOS
H. C. Bailey's CALL MR. FORTUNE
G. K. Chesterton's THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY
Agatha Christie's THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD
Wilkie Collins's THE MOONSTONE
A. Conan Doyle's THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES
Dashiell Hammett's THE MALTESE FALCON
Edgar Allan Poe's THE MYSTERY OF MARIE ROGÊT
Dorothy L. Sayers's and
Robert Eustace's THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE
S. S. Van Dine's THE BENSON MURDER CASE

As you see, Mr. Stout, in the intervening years, has changed his mind — he has made no less than four alterations in his original list of ten; and it is

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altogether probable that a few years from now — perhaps even a week from now — Mr. Stout would find entirely justifiable grounds for changing his mind again. It is always thus, for all of us who attempt the impossible and thankless task of choosing any sort of desert-island list.

Surely Vincent Starrett will be pleased to note at least one of Mr. Stout's changes. Commenting on the original choices, Vincent Starrett was disturbed by the omission of a representative volume about Sherlock Holmes, and was frank enough to declare that Stout would get no applause from Starrett for so conspicuous an omission. Yes, we too agree that a Sherlock Holmes book is an absolute "must" in any list of ten — but we can't help going on record that our personal choice would be, unalterably, THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.

Glory be and thank the Lord for American democracy — where every man has not only the inalienable right to his own opinion, but the unsuppressible right to state it publicly. Plant that seed of democracy — the sacred right of free speech — the world over, and the world will be made safe for more than just detective stories . . .

THE COP KILLER

by REX STOUT

THERE WERE SEVERAL REASONS why I had no complaints as I walked along West 35th Street that morning, approaching the stoop of Nero Wolfe's old brownstone house, where I both lived and worked. The day was sunny and sparkling, my new shoes felt fine after the brisk mile walk, a complicated infringement case had been polished off for a big client, and I had just deposited a check in five figures to Wolfe's account in the bank.

Five paces short of the stoop I became aware that two people, a man and a woman, were standing on the sidewalk across the street, staring either at the stoop or at me, or maybe both. That lifted me a notch higher, with the thought that while two rubbernecks might not put us in a class with the White House, still it was nothing to sneeze at, until a second glance made me realize that I had seen them before. But where? Instead of turning up the steps I faced them, just as they stepped off the curb and started toward me.

"Mr. Goodwin," the woman said, in a sort of gasping whisper.

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She was fair-skinned and blue-eyed, young enough, kind of nice-looking, and neat in a dark-blue assembly-line coat. He was as dark as she was fair, not much bigger, with his nose slanting slightly to the left, and a full, wide mouth. My delay in recognizing him was because I had never seen him with a hat on before. He was the hat and coat and necktie custodian at the barbershop I went to.

"Oh, it's you, Carl —"

"Can we go in with you?" the woman asked in the same gasping whisper, and then I knew her, too. She was also from the barbershop, a manicurist. I had never hired her, since I do my own nails, but had seen her around and had heard her called Tina.

I looked down at her smooth, white little face with its pointed chin, and didn't care for the expression on it. I glanced at Carl, and he looked even worse.

"What's the matter?" I guess I was gruff. "Trouble?"

"Please, not out here," Tina pleaded. Her eyes darted left and right, and back up at me. "We just got enough brave to go to the door when you came. Please let us in?"

"You told me once," Carl practically whined, "that people in danger only have to mention your name."

"Nuts. A pleasantry. I talk too much." But I was stuck. "Okay, come in and tell me about it."

I led the way up the steps and let us in with my key. Inside, the first door on the left of the long, wide hall led to what we called the front room, and I opened it, thinking to get it over with in there, but Fritz was there dusting, so I took them along to the next door and on into the office. After moving a couple of chairs so they would be facing me, I sat at my desk and nodded at them impatiently. Tina had looked around, swiftly, before she sat.

"Such a nice, safe room," she said, "for you and Mr. Wolfe, two such great men."

"He's the great one," I corrected her. "I just caddie. What's this about danger?"

"We love this country," Carl said emphatically. All of a sudden he started trembling, first his hands, then his arms and shoulders, then all over. Tina darted to him and grabbed his elbows and shook him, not gently, and said things to him in some language I wasn't up on. He mumbled back at her, and after a little the trembling stopped.

"We do love this country," she declared.

I nodded. "Wait till you see Chillicothe, Ohio, where I was born. Then you *will* love it. How far west have you been — Tenth Avenue?"

"I don't think so." Tina was doubtful. "I think Eighth Avenue. But that's what we want to do, go west." She opened her blue leather handbag and, with no fingering or digging, took something from it. "But, you see, we don't know where to go. This Ohio, maybe? I have fifty dollars here."

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"That would get you there," I allowed.

She shook her head. "Oh, no. The fifty dollars is for you. You know our name — Vardas? You know we are married? So there is no question of morals; we are very high in morals; only, all we want is to do our work and live in private, Carl and me, and we think —"

Having heard the clatter of Wolfe's elevator descending from the plant-rooms on the roof, I had known an interruption was coming, but had let her proceed. Now she stopped, as Wolfe's steps sounded and he appeared at the door. Carl and Tina both bounced to their feet. Two paces in, after a quick glance at them, Wolfe stopped short and glowered at me.

"I didn't tell you we had callers," I said cheerfully, "because I knew you would be down soon. You know Carl, at the barbershop? And Tina, you've seen her there, too. It's all right, they're married. They just dropped in to buy fifty bucks' worth of —"

Without a word or even a nod, Wolfe turned all of his seventh of a ton and beat it out toward the door to the kitchen at the rear. The Vardas family stared at the doorway a moment and then turned to me.

"Sit down," I invited them. "As you said, he's a great man. He's sore because I didn't notify him we had company, and he was expecting to sit there behind his desk" — I waved a hand — "and ring for beer and enjoy himself. He wouldn't wiggle a finger for fifty dollars. Maybe I won't, either, but let's see." I looked at Tina, who was back on the edge of her chair. "You were saying —"

"We don't want Mr. Wolfe mad at us," Tina said in distress.

"Forget it. He's only mad at me, which is chronic. What do you want to go to Ohio for?"

"Maybe not Ohio." She tried to smile again. "It's what I said — we love this country and we want to go more into it — far in. We want you to tell us where to go, to help us —"

"No, no." I was brusque. "Start from here. What's the danger Carl mentioned?"

"I don't think," she protested, "it makes any difference —"

"That's no good," Carl said harshly. His hands started trembling again, but he gripped the sides of his chair seat and they stopped. His dark eyes fastened on me. "I met Tina," he said in a low, level voice, trying to keep feeling out of it, "three years ago in a concentration camp in Russia. If you want me to I will tell you why it was that they would never have let us get out of there alive, not in one hundred years, but I would rather not talk so much about it. It makes me start to tremble, and I am trying to learn to act and talk of a manner so I can quit trembling."

I concurred. "Save it for some day after you stop trembling. But you did get out alive?"

"Plainly. We are here." There was an edge of triumph to the level voice. "I will not tell you about that,

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either. But they think we are dead. Of course, Vardas was not our name then, neither of us. We took that name later, when we got married in Istanbul. Then we so managed —"

"You shouldn't tell any places," Tina scolded him. "No places at all and no people at all."

"You are most right," Carl admitted. He informed me: "It was not Istanbul. Anyway, we went many places, and at a certain time in a certain way we crossed the ocean. We had tried very hard to come to this country according to your rules, but it was in no way possible. When we did get into New York it was more by accident — No, I did not say that. Only I will say we got into New York. For a while it was so difficult, but it has been nearly a year now, since we got the jobs at the barbershop, that life has been so fine and sweet that we are almost healthy again. What we eat! We have even got us some money saved! We have got —"

"Fifty dollars," Tina said hastily.

"Most right," Carl agreed. "Fifty American dollars. I can say as a fact that we would be happy beyond our utmost dreams three years ago, except for the danger. The danger is that we did not follow your rules. I will not deny that they are good rules, but for us they were impossible. We cannot expect ourselves to be happy when we don't know what minute someone may come and ask us how we got here. We have found a way to learn what would happen, and we know where we would be sent back to. We know what would happen to us."

I glanced at Tina, but the expression on her face could have made me uncomfortable, so I looked back at Carl. "If I tried to figure a way out, I doubt if I would pick on spilling it to a guy named Archie Goodwin just because he came to the barbershop where I worked. He might be crazy about the rules you couldn't follow, and, anyhow, there are just as many minutes in Ohio as there are in New York."

"There is that fifty dollars." Carl extended his hands, not trembling, toward me.

Tina gestured impatiently. "That's nothing to you," she said, letting bitterness in it for the first time. "We know that; it's nothing. But the danger has come and we had to have someone tell us where to go. This morning a man came to the barbershop and asked us questions. An official! A policeman!"

"Oh." I glanced from one to the other. "That's different. A policeman in uniform?"

"No, in regular clothes, but he showed us a card in a case — New York Police Department. His name was on it, Jacob Wallen."

"What time this morning?"

"A little after nine o'clock, soon after the shop was open. He talked first with Mr. Fickler, the owner, and Mr. Fickler brought him around behind the partition to my booth, where I do customers when they're through in the chair or when they

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only want a manicure, and I was there getting things together, and he sat down and took out a notebook and asked me questions. Then he —"

"What kind of questions?"

"All about me. My name, where I live, where I came from, how long I've been working there, all that kind, and then about last night, where I was and what I was doing last night."

"What part of last night did he ask about? All of it?"

"Yes, from the time the shop closes, half-past six, from then on."

"Where did you tell him you came from?"

"I said Carl and I are DP's from Italy. That's what we had decided to say. We have to say something when people are just curious."

"I suppose you do. Did he ask to see your papers?"

"No. That will come next." She set her jaw. "We can't go back there. We have to leave New York today — right now."

"Did he question Carl, too?"

"Yes, but not right after me. He sent me away, and Mr. Fickler sent Philip to him in the next booth, and when Philip came out he sent Carl in, and when Carl came out he sent Jimmie in. Jimmie was still in the booth with him when I went to Carl, up front by the rack, and we knew we had to get out. We waited until Mr. Fickler had gone to the back of the shop for something, and then we just walked out. We went to our room down on the East Side and packed our bag and started for Grand Central with it, and then we realized we didn't know anything about where to go and might make some terrible mistake, so there in Grand Central we talked it over. We decided that the best thing would be to come to you and pay you to help us. You're a professional detective, and, anyway, Carl likes you about the best of all the customers. You only tip him a dime, so it's not that. I have noticed you myself, the way you look. You look like a man who would break rules, too — if you had to."

I gave her a sharp look, suspicious, but if she was trying to butter me she was very good. All that showed in her blue eyes was the scare that had put them on the run and the hope of me they were hanging on to for dear life. I looked at Carl. The scare was there too, but I couldn't see the hope.

I was irritated. "You bring it here already broke," I protested. "What did you beat it for? That alone fixes you. And what about last night? What were you doing — breaking some more rules?"

They both started to answer, but she let him take it. He said no, they weren't. They had gone straight home from work and eaten in their room, as usual. Tina had washed some clothes and Carl had read a book. Around nine they had gone for a walk, and had been back in their room and in bed before ten thirty.

I was disgusted. "You sure did it up," I declared. "If you're clean for last night, why didn't you stay put? You must have something in your

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heads or you wouldn't have stayed alive and got this far. Why didn't you use it?"

Carl smiled at me. He really did smile, but it didn't make me want to smile back. "A policeman asking questions," he said in the level tone he had used before, "has a different effect on different people. If you have a country like this one, and you are innocent of crime, all the people of your country are saying it with you when you answer the questions. It takes a whole country to speak to a policeman, and Tina and I — we do not have one."

"You see," Tina said. "Here, take it." She got up and came to me, extending a hand with the money in it. "Take it, Mr. Goodwin! Just tell us where to go, all the little facts that will help us."

"Or we thought," Carl suggested, not hopefully, "that you might give us a letter to some friend, in this Ohio, perhaps. Not that we should expect too much for fifty dollars . . ."

I looked at them with my lips pressed together. The morning was shot now, anyway, with Wolfe sore and my chores not done. I swiveled to my desk and picked up the phone. Any one of three or four city employees would probably find out for me what kind of errand had taken a dick named Wallen to the Goldenrod Barbershop, unless it was something very special. But with my finger in the dial hole I hesitated, and then replaced the phone. If it was something hot I would be starting PD cars for our address, and Wolfe and I both have a prejudice against cops yanking people out of his office, no matter who they are, unless we, ourselves, have got them ready for delivery. So I swiveled again.

"This is silly," I said. "If they're really after you, you'd be throwing your money away on carfare to Ohio or anywhere else. Save it for a lawyer. I'll have to go up there and see what it's all about." I got up, crossed to the soundproof door to the front room, and opened it. "You can wait here. In here, please?"

"We'll go," Tina said, back to her gasping whisper again. "We won't bother you any more. Come, Carl —"

"Skip it," I said curtly. "If this amounts to anything more than petty larceny you'd be nabbed sure as shooting. This is my day for breaking a rule, and I'll be back soon. Come on; I'll put you in here, and I advise you to stay put."

Tina moved. She came and passed through into the front room, and Carl was right behind her. I told them to sit down and relax and not get restless. Then I shut the door and went to the kitchen, where Wolfe was seated at the far end of the long table, drinking beer. I told him, "The check from Pendexter came and has been deposited. That pair of foreigners have got themselves in a mess. I put them in the front room and told them to stay there until I get back."

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"A little detective work, not in

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your class. I won't be gone long. You can dock me."

The Goldenrod Barbershop was in the basement of an office building on Lexington Avenue in the upper Thirties. I had been patronizing one of the staff, named Ed, for several years. Formerly, from away back, Wolfe had gone to an artist in a shop on 28th Street, named Fletcher. When Fletcher had retired a couple of years ago Wolfe had switched to Goldenrod, and after experimenting with the staff had settled on Jimmie. His position now, after two years, was that Jimmie was no Fletcher, especially with a shampoo, but that he was some better than tolerable.

Goldenrod, with only six chairs, and usually only four of them manned, and two manicurists, was not fancy, but it was well equipped and clean. Anyhow, it had Ed, who had a razor so sharp and slick you never knew it was on you.

I hadn't shaved that morning, and as, at noon, I paid the taxi driver, entered the building, and descended the stairs to the basement, my plan of campaign was simple. I would get in Ed's chair, waiting if necessary, and ask him to give me a once-over, and the rest would be easy.

But it was neither simple nor easy. A medium-sized mob of white-collar workers, buzzing and chattering, was ranged three-deep along the wall of the corridor facing the door of the shop. Others, passing by in both directions, were stopping to try to look in, and a flatfoot, posted in the doorway, was telling them to keep moving.

I swerved aside and halted for a survey through the open door. Joel Fickler, the boss, was at the rack where Carl usually presided, taking a man's coat to put on a hanger. A man with his hat on was backed up to the cashier's counter, with his elbows on it, facing the whole shop. Two other men with their hats on were seated near the middle of the row of chairs for waiting customers, one of them next to the little table for magazines. They were discussing something without much enthusiasm. Two of the barbers' chairs, Ed's and Tom's, were occupied. The other two barbers, Jimmie and Philip, were on their stools against the wall. Janet, the other manicurist, was not in sight.

I stepped to the doorway and was going on in. The flatfoot blocked me. "Accident in here. Only customers with appointments allowed in. You got an appointment?"

"Certainly." I stuck my head through the doorway and yelled, "Ed! How soon?"

The man leaning on the counter straightened up and turned for a look. At sight of me he grunted. "Who whistled for you?"

The presence of my old friend and enemy, Sergeant Purley Stebbins, of Manhattan Homicide, gave the thing an entirely different flavor. Up to then I had just been mildly curious, floating along. Now I snapped to attention. Sergeant Stebbins is not

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interested in petty larceny. I didn't care for the possibility of having shown a pair of murderers to chairs in our front room.

Purley scowled at me. "Is this going to turn into one of them Nero Wolfe babies?"

"Not unless you turn it." I grinned at him. "Whatever it is. I dropped in for a shave, that's all, and here you boys are, to my surprise." The flatfoot had given me leeway, and I had crossed the sill. "I'm a regular customer here." I turned to Fickler, who had trotted over to us: "How long have I been leaving my hair here, Joel?"

None of Fickler's bones was anywhere near the surface except on his bald head. He was six inches shorter than me, which may have been one reason why I never got a straight look into his narrow black eyes. He had never liked me much since the day he had forgotten to list an appointment with Ed I had made on the phone and I, under provocation, had made a few pointed remarks. Now he looked as if he had been annoyed by something much worse than remarks.

"Over six years, Mr. Goodwin," he said. "This," he told Purley, "is the famous detective, Mr. Archie Goodwin. Mr. Nero Wolfe comes here, too."

Purley snorted. "Famous!"

I shrugged. "Just a nuisance."

"Yeah. Don't let it get you down. You just dropped in for a shave?"

"Yes, sir. Write it down and I'll sign it."

"Who's your barber?"

"Ed."

"That's Graboff. He's busy."

"So I see. I'm not pressed. I'll chat with you or read a magazine or get a manicure."

"I don't feel like chatting." Purley had not relaxed the scowl. "You know a guy that works here named Carl Vardas? And his wife Tina, a manicurist?"

"I know Carl well enough to pay him a dime for my hat and coat and tie. I can't say I know Tina, but of course I've seen her here. Why?"

"I'm just asking. And to have it on the record in case it's needed, have you seen Vardas or his wife this morning?"

"Sure, I have." I stretched my neck to get closer to his ear and whispered, "I put them in our front room and told them to wait, and beat it up here to tell you, and if you'll step on it —"

"I don't care for gags," he growled. "Not right now. They killed a cop, or one of them did. You know how much we like that."

I did, indeed, and adjusted my face accordingly. "One of yours? Did I know him?"

"No. A dick from the Twentieth Precinct, Jake Wallen."

"Where and when?"

"This morning, right here. The other side of that partition, in Tina's manicure booth. Stuck a pair of scissors in his back and got his pump. Apparently, he never made a sound, but them massage things are going

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here off and on. By the time he was found, the Vardas pair had gone. It took us an hour to find out where they lived, and when we got there they had been and got their stuff and beat it."

I grunted sympathetically. "Is it tied up? Prints on the scissors or something?"

"We'll do all right without prints," Purley said grimly. "Didn't I say they lammed?"

"Yes, but," I objected, not aggressively, "some people can get awful scared at sight of a man with scissors sticking in his back. I wasn't intimate with Carl, but he didn't strike me as a man who would stab a cop just on principle. Was Wallen here to take him?"

Purley's reply was stopped before it got started. Tom had finished with his customer, and the two men with hats on in the row of chairs ranged along the partition were keeping their eyes on the customer as he went to the rack for his tie. Tom, having brushed himself off, had walked to the front and up to us. Usually Tom bounced around like a high-school kid, in spite of his white-haired sixty-some years, but today his feet dragged. Nor did he tell me hello, though he gave me a sort of glance before he spoke to Purley: "It's my lunchtime, Sergeant. I just go to the cafeteria at the end of the hall."

Purley called a name that sounded like Joffe, and one of the dicks on a chair by the partition got up and came.

"Yerkes is going to lunch," Purley told him. "Go along and stay with him."

They went, with Tom in front. Purley and I moved out of the way as the customer approached to pay his check and Fickler sidled around behind the cash register.

"I thought," I said politely, "you had settled for Carl and Tina. Why does Tom have to have company at lunch?"

"We haven't got Carl and Tina."

"But you soon will have, the way the personnel feels about cop killers. Why pester these innocent barbers? If one of them gets nervous and slices a customer, then what?"

Purley merely snarled.

I stiffened. "Excuse me. I'm not so partial to cop killers, either. It seemed only natural to show some interest. Luckily I can read, so I'll catch it in the evening paper."

"Don't bust a gut." Purley's eyes were following the customer as he walked to the door and on out past the flatfoot. "Sure, we'll get Carl and Tina, but if you don't mind we'll just watch these guys' appetites. You asked what Jake Wallen was here for."

"I asked if he came to take Carl."

"Yeah. I think he did, but I can't prove it yet. Last night around midnight a woman was hit by a car at Eighty-first and Broadway. She was killed. The car kept going. It was found later parked at Ninety-sixth and Broadway, just across from the subway entrance. We haven't found anyone who saw the driver, either

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at the scene of the accident or where the car was parked. The car was hot. It had been parked by its owner at eight o'clock on Forty-eighth Street between Ninth and Tenth, and was gone when he went for it at eleven thirty."

Purley paused to watch a customer enter. The customer got past the flat-foot with Joel Fickler's help, left things at the rack, and went and got on Jimmie's chair. Purley returned to me:

"When the car was spotted by a squad car at Ninety-sixth and Broadway, with a dented fender and blood and other items that tagged it, the Twentieth Precinct sent Jake Wallen to it. He was the first one to give it a look. Later, there was a gang from all over, including the laboratory, going over it before they moved it. Wallen was supposed to go home at eight in the morning, when his trick ended, but he didn't. He phoned his wife that he had a hot lead on a hit-and-run killer and was going to handle it himself and grab a promotion. Not only that, he phoned the owner of the car, at his home in Yonkers, and asked him if he had any connection with the Goldenrod Barbershop or knew anyone who had, or if he had ever been there. The owner had never heard of it. Of course, we've collected all this since we were called here at ten fifteen and found Wallen DOA with scissors in his back."

I was frowning. "But what gave him the lead to this shop?"

"We'd like to know. It had to be something he found in the car — we don't know what. The poor fool kept it to himself and came here and got killed."

"Didn't he show it or mention it to anyone here?"

"They say not. All he had with him was a newspaper. We've got it — today's *Daily Press*, the early, out last night. We can't spot anything in it. There was nothing in his pockets, nothing on him, that helps any."

A phone rang. Fickler, by the cash register, looked at Purley, who stepped to the counter where the phone was and answered the call. It was for him. When, after a minute, it seemed to be going on, I moved away, and had gone a few paces when a voice came: "Hello, Mr. Goodwin."

It was Jimmie, Wolfe's man, using comb and scissors about his customer's right ear. He was the youngest of the staff, about my age, and by far the handsomest, with curly lips and white teeth and dancing dark eyes. I told him hello.

"Mr. Wolfe ought to be here," he said.

Under the circumstances I thought that a little tactless, and was even prepared to tell him so, when Ed called to me from two chairs down: "Fifteen minutes, Mr. Goodwin? All right?"

I told him okay, I would wait, and crossed to one of the chairs over by the partition, next to the table with magazines. I thought it would be fitting to pick up a magazine, but I had already read the one on top, the

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latest issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine;* it was still in its full mailing-wrapper, but I recognized it because the magazine had slid out of the wrapper a little, so that the upper part of the front cover showed outside the tan mailing-sheath. The other magazines didn't interest me, so I leaned back and let my eyes go, from left to right and back again.

Though I had been coming there for six years, I didn't really know those people, in spite of the reputation barbers have as conversationalists. I knew that Fickler, the boss, had once been attacked bodily there in the shop by his ex-wife; that Philip had had two sons killed in World War II; that Tom had once been accused by Fickler of swiping lotions and other supplies and had slapped Fickler's face; that Ed played the horses and was always in debt; that Jimmie had to be watched or he would take magazines from the shop while they were still current; and that Janet, who had been there only a year, was suspected of having a side line, maybe dope peddling. Aside from such items as those, they were strangers.

Suddenly Janet was there in front of me. She had come from around the end of the partition, and not alone. The man with her was a broad-shouldered husky, gray-haired and gray-eyed, with an unlit cigar slanting up from a corner of his mouth. His eyes swept the whole shop, and since he started at the far right he ended up at me.

He stared. "For Pete's sake," he said. "You? Now what?"

I was surprised for a second to see Inspector Cramer himself, head of Manhattan Homicide, there on the job.

"Just waiting for a shave," I told him. "I'm an old customer here. You can ask Purley."

Purley came over and verified me, but Cramer checked with Ed, himself. Then he drew Purley aside and they mumbled back and forth a while, after which Cramer summoned Philip and escorted him around the end of the partition.

Janet seated herself in the chair next to mine. She looked even better in profile than head on, with her nice chin and straight little nose and long, homegrown lashes. I felt a little in debt to her, for the mild pleasure I had got occasionally as I sat in Ed's chair and glanced at her while she worked on the customer in the next chair.

"I was wondering where you were," I remarked.

She turned to me. "Did you say something?" she asked.

"Nothing vital. My name's Goodwin. Call me Archie."

"I know. You're a detective. How can I keep them from having my picture in the paper?"

"You can't, if they've already got it. Have they?"

"I think so. I wish I was dead."

"I don't." I made it not loud but emphatic.

"Why should you? I do. My folks

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in Michigan think I'm acting or modeling. I leave it vague. And here — oh, my heavens!" Her chin worked, but she controlled it.

"Work is work," I said. "My parents wanted me to be a college president, and I wanted to be a second baseman, and look at me. Anyhow, if your picture gets printed and it's a good likeness, who knows what will happen?"

"This is my Gethsemane," she said.

That made me suspicious, naturally. She had mentioned acting. "Come off it," I advised her. "Think of someone else. Think of the guy that got stabbed — no, he's out of it — thinks of his wife. How do you suppose she feels? Or Inspector Cramer, with the job he's got. What was he asking you just now?"

She didn't hear me. She said through clamped teeth, "I only wish I had some guts."

"Why? What would you do?"

"I'd tell all about it."

"You mean last night? Why not try it out on me and see how it goes? Just keep your voice down and let it flow."

She didn't hear a word. Her ears were disconnected. She kept her brown eyes, under the long lashes, straight at me:

"How it happened this morning. How I was going back to my booth after I finished Mr. Levinson in Philip's chair, and he called me into Tina's booth, and he seized me, with one hand on my throat so I couldn't scream, and there was no doubt at all what he intended, so I grabbed the scissors from the shelf and, without realizing what I was doing, plunged them into him with all my strength, and he collapsed onto the chair. That's what I would do if I really want a successful career. I would have to be arrested and have a trial, and then —"

"Hold it. Your pronouns. Mr. Levinson called you into Tina's booth?"

"Certainly not. That man that got killed." She tilted her head back. "See the marks on my throat?"

There was no mark whatever on her smooth, pretty throat.

"Bravo," I said. "That would get you top billing anywhere."

"That's what I was saying."

"Then go ahead and tell it."

"I can't! I simply can't! It would be so darned vulgar."

At the moment I could have slapped her lovely young face with pleasure. "I understand your position," I said, "a girl as sweet and fine and strong as you, but it's bound to come out in the end, and I want to help. Incidentally, I am not married. I'll go to Inspector Cramer right now and tell him about it. He'll want to take photographs of your throat. Do you know any lawyers?"

She shook her head, answering, I thought, my question about lawyers, but no. She didn't believe in answering questions. "About your being married," she said, "I hadn't even thought. I think a girl must get her career established *first*. That's why

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when I see an attractive man I never wonder if he's married; by the time I'm ready for one these will be too old. I think a girl —"

If Ed hadn't signaled to me just then, his customer having left the chair, there's no telling how it would have ended. No words would have been any good, since she was deaf, but surely I might have thought of something. As it was, I didn't want to keep Ed waiting, so I got up and crossed to his chair and climbed in.

"Just scrape the face," I told him.

He got a bib on me and tilted me back. "Did you phone?" he asked. "Did that fathead forget again?"

I told him no, that I had been caught midtown with a stubble and an unforeseen errand for which I should be presentable, and added, "You seem to have had some excitement."

He went to the cabinet for a tube of prefabricated lather, got some on me, started rubbing. "We sure did," he said with feeling. "Carl — you know Carl — he killed a man in Tina's booth. Then they both ran. I'm sorry for Tina — she was all right — but Carl — I don't know."

I couldn't articulate with him rubbing. He finished, went to wipe his fingers, and came with the razor. I remarked, "I'd sort of watch it, Ed. It's a little risky to go blabbing that Carl killed him unless you can prove it."

"Well, what did he run for?"

"I couldn't say. But the cops are still poking around here."

"Sure, they are; they're after evidence. You gotta have evidence." Ed pulled the skin tight over the jawbone. "For instance, they ask me did he show me anything or ask me anything about some article from the shop. I say he didn't. That would be evidence, see?"

"Yes, I get it." I could only mumble. "What did he ask you?"

"Oh, all about me — name, married or single, you know, insurance men, income tax, they all ask the same things. But when he asked about last night I told him where to get off, but then I thought, why not? And I told him.

"Of course," he said, "the police have to get it straight, but they can't expect us to remember everything. When he came in, first he talked with Fickler, maybe five minutes. Then Fickler took him to Tina's booth and he talked with Tina. After that Fickler sent Philip in, and then Carl and then Jimmie, and then Tom and then me, and then Janet. I think it's pretty good to remember that."

I mumbled agreement. He was at the corner of my mouth.

"But I can't remember everything and they can't make me. I don't know how long it was after Janet came back out before Fickler went to Tina's booth and found him dead. They ask me was it nearer ten minutes or nearer fifteen, but I say I had a customer at the time, we all did but Philip, and I don't know. They ask me how many of us went behind the partition after Janet came out, to the

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steamer or the vat or to get the lamp or something, but I say again I had a customer at the time, and I don't know, except I know I didn't go because I was trimming Mr. Howell at the time. I was working the top when Fickler yelled and came running out. They can ask Mr. Howell."

"They probably have," I said, but to no one, because Ed had gone for a hot towel.

He returned, and used the towel, and got the lilac water. Patting it on, he resumed, "They ask me exactly when Carl and Tina went, they ask me that twenty times, but I can't say and I won't say. Carl did it, all right, but they can't prove it by me. They've gotta have evidence, but I don't. Cold towel today?"

"No, I'll keep the smell."

He brought a comb and brush. "Can I remember what I don't know?" he demanded.

"I know I can't."

"And I'm no great detective like you." Ed was a little rough with a brush. "And now I go for lunch but I've got to have a cop along. They searched all of us down to the skin, and they even brought a woman to search Janet. They took our fingerprints. I admit they've gotta have evidence." He flipped the bib off. "How was the razor, all right?"

I told him it was fine as usual, stepped down, fished for a quarter, and exchanged it for my check. Purley Stebbins, nearby, was watching both of us. There had been times when I had seen fit to kid Purley at the scene of a murder, but not now. A cop had been killed.

He spoke, not belligerently: "The inspector don't like your being here."

"Neither do I," I declared. "Fortunately, this didn't happen to be Mr. Wolfe's day for a haircut; you would never have believed it. I'm just a minor coincidence. Nice to see you."

I went and paid my check to Fickler, got my things on, and departed.

As I emerged into Lexington Avenue there were several things on my mind. The most immediate was this: If Cramer's suspicion had been aroused enough to spend a man on me, and if I were seen going directly home from the shop, there might be too much curiosity as to why I had chosen to spend six bits for a shave at that time of day. So, instead of taking a taxi, I walked, and when I got to a five-and-ten I used their aisles and exits to make sure I had no tail. That left my mind free for other things the rest of the way home.

One leading question was whether Carl and Tina would still be where I had left them, in the front room. That was what took me up the seven steps of the stoop two at a time, and on in quick. The answer to the question was no. The front room was empty. I strode down the hall to the office, but stopped there because I heard Wolfe's voice. It was coming from the dining room, and it was saying:

"No, Mr. Vardas, I cannot agree that mountain climbing is merely one

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manifestation of man's spiritual aspirations. I think, instead, it is an hysterical paroxysm of his infantile vanity. One of the prime ambitions of a jackass is to bray louder than any other jackass, and man is not . . ."

I crossed the hall and the dining-room sill. Wolfe was at his end of the table, and Fritz, standing at his elbow, had just removed the lid from a steaming platter. At his left was Tina, and Carl was at his right; my place when there was no company. Wolfe saw me but finished his lecture on mountain climbing before attending to me: "In time, Archie. You like veal and mushrooms."

Talk about infantile. His not being willing to sit down to his lunch with unfed people in the house was all well enough, but why not send trays in to them? That was easy. He was sore at me and I had called them foreigners.

I stepped to the end of the table and said, "I know you have a paroxysm if I try to bring up business during meals, but eighteen thousand cops would give a month's pay to get their hands on Carl and Tina, your guests."

"Indeed." Wolfe was serving the veal and accessories. "Why?"

"Have you talked with them?"

"No. I merely invited them to lunch."

"Then don't until I've reported. I ran into Cramer and Stebbins at the barbershop."

"Confound it." The serving spoon stopped en route.

"Yeah. It's quite interesting. But first lunch, of course. I'll go put the chain bolt on. Please dish me some veal."

Carl and Tina were speechless.

That lunch was one of Wolfe's best performances, I admit it. He didn't know a thing about Carl and Tina except that they were in a jam, he knew that Cramer and Stebbins dealt only with homicide, and he had a strong prejudice against entertaining murderers at his table. His only hope now was his knowledge that I was aware of his prejudice, and even shared it.

He must have been fairly tight inside, but he stayed the polite host clear to the end, with no sign of hurry even with the coffee. Then, however, the tension began to tell. Ordinarily his return to the office after a meal was leisurely and lazy, but this time he went right along, followed by his guests and me. He marched across to his chair behind the desk, got his bulk deposited, and snapped at me, "What have you got us into now?"

I was pulling chairs around so the Vardas family would be facing him, but stopped to give him an eye. "Us?" I inquired.

"Yes."

"Okay," I said courteously, "if that's how it is. I did not invite them to come here, let alone to lunch. They came on their own and I let them in, which is one of my functions. Having started it, I'll finish it. May I use the front room? I'll have them out of here in a minute."

"Pfui." He was supercilious. "I

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am now responsible for their presence, since they were my guests at lunch. . . . Sit down, sir. Sit down, Mrs. Vardas."

Carl and Tina didn't know what from which. I had to push the chairs up behind their knees. Then I went to my own chair and swiveled to face Wolfe.

"I have a question to ask them," I told him, "but first you need a couple of facts: They're in this country without papers. They were in a concentration camp in Russia, and they're not telling how they got here if they can help it. They could be spies, but I doubt it after hearing them talk. Naturally, they jump a mile if they hear someone say boo, and when a man came to the barbershop this morning and showed a police card and asked who they were and where they came from and what they were doing last night, they scooted the first chance they got. But they didn't know where to go, so they came here to buy fifty bucks' worth of advice. I got bighearted and went to the shop, myself."

"You went?" Tina gasped.

I turned to them. "Sure, I went. It's a complicated situation, but I think I can handle it if you two can be kept out of the way. It would be dangerous for you to stay here. I know a safe place up in the Bronx for you to lay low for a few days. You shouldn't take a chance on a taxi or the subway, so we'll go around the corner to the garage and get Mr. Wolfe's car, and you can drive it —"

"Excuse me," Carl said urgently. "You would drive us up there?"

"No, I'll be busy. Then I'll —"

"But I can't drive a car! I don't know how!"

"Then your wife will drive."

"She can't! She don't know, either!"

I sprang from my chair and stood over them. "Look," I said savagely; "save that for the cops. Can't drive a car? Certainly you can! Everybody can!"

They were looking up at me, Carl bewildered, Tina frowning. "In America, yes," she said. "But we are not Americans, not yet. We have never had a chance to learn."

"What's this?" Wolfe demanded.

I returned to my chair. "That," I said, "was the question I wanted to ask. It has a bearing, as you'll soon see." I regarded Carl and Tina. "If you're lying about this, not knowing how to drive a car, you won't be sent back home to die, you'll die right here. It will be a cinch to find out if you're lying."

"Why should we?" Carl demanded. "What is so important in it?"

"Once more," I insisted, "can you drive a car?"

"No."

"Can you, Tina?"

"No!"

"Okay." I turned to Wolfe: "The caller at the barbershop this morning was a precinct dick named Wallen. Fickler took him to Tina's booth and he questioned Tina first. Then the others had a session with him in the

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booth, in this order: Philip, Carl, Jimmie, Tom, Ed, and Janet. You may not know that the manicure booths are around behind the long partition. After Janet came out there was a period of ten or fifteen minutes when Wallen was in the booth alone. Then Fickler went to see, and what he saw was Wallen's body with scissors buried in his back. Someone had stabbed him to death. Since Carl and Tina had lammed —"

Tina's cry was more of a gasp, a last gasp, an awful sound. With one leap she was out of her chair and at Carl, grasping him and begging wildly, "Carl, no! No, no! Oh, Carl —!"

"Make her stop," Wolfe snapped.

I had to try, because Wolfe would rather be in a room with a hungry tiger than with a woman out of hand. I went and got a grip on her shoulder, but released it at sight of the expression on Carl's face as he pushed to his feet against the pressure. It looked as if he could and would handle it. He did.

He eased her back to her chair and down onto it, and turned to me: "That man was killed there in Tina's booth?"

"Yes."

Carl smiled as he had once before, and I wished he would stop trying it. "Then of course," he said, as if he were conceding a point in a tight argument, "this is the end for us. But, please, I must ask you not to blame my wife. Because we have been through many things together she is ready to credit me with many deeds that are far beyond me. She has a big idea of me and I have a big idea of her. But I did not kill that man. I did not touch him." He frowned. "I don't understand why you suggested riding in a car to the Bronx. Of course you will give us to the police."

"Forget the Bronx." I was frowning back. "Every cop in town has his eye peeled for you. Sit down."

He went to his chair and sat.

"About driving a car," Wolfe muttered. "Was that flummery?"

"No, sir, that comes next. Last night around midnight a hit-and-run driver in a stolen car killed a woman up on Broadway. The car was found parked at Broadway and Ninety-sixth Street. Wallen, from the Twentieth Precinct, was the first dick to look it over. In it he apparently found something that led him to the Goldenrod Barbershop — anyhow, he phoned his wife that he was on a hot one that would lead to glory and a raise, and then he showed up at the shop and called the roll, as described. With the result also as described. Cramer has bought it that the hit-and-run driver found himself cornered and used the scissors, and Cramer — don't quote me — is not a dope. To qualify as a hit-and-run driver you must meet certain specifications, and one of them is knowing how to drive a car. So the best plan would be for Carl and Tina to go back to the shop and report for duty and for the official quiz, if it wasn't for two things: First, the fact that they lammed will make it very tough, and, second, even though it is settled that they didn't kill a cop,

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their lack of documents will fix them anyhow."

I waved a hand. "So actually what's the difference? If they're sent back where they came from they're doomed, so they say. Between a doom here and a doom there, that's all they have to pick from. One interesting angle is that you are harboring fugitives from justice, and I am not. I told Purley they're here."

"You what?" Wolfe bellowed.

"What I said. That's the advantage of having a reputation for gags — you can say practically anything if you handle your face right. I told him they were here in our front room, and he sailed right over it. So I'm clean, but you're not. You can't even just show them out. If you don't want to call Cramer yourself I could get Purley at the shop and tell him they're still here, and why hasn't he sent for them?"

"It might be better," Tina said, not with hope, "just a little better, if you would let us go, ourselves? No?"

She got no answer. Wolfe was glaring at me. It wasn't that he needed my description of the situation to realize what a pickle he was in; I have never tried to deny that the interior decorator did a snappier job inside his skull than in mine. What had him boiling was my little stunt of getting it down that neither Carl nor Tina could drive a car. But for that it would still have been possible to let them meet the law and take what they got; now that was out of the question.

"There is," he said, glaring, "another alternative to consider."

"Yes, sir. What?"

"Let us just go," Tina said.

"Pfui." He moved the glare to her: "You would try to skedaddle, and be caught within an hour." Back to me: "You have told Mr. Stebbins they are here. We can simply keep them here and await developments. Since Mr. Cramer and Mr. Stebbins are still there at work, they may soon disclose the murderer."

"Sure, they may," I agreed, "but I doubt it. They're just being thorough, they've really settled for Carl and Tina, and what they're looking for is evidence, especially what it was that led Wallen to the barbershop — though I suppose they haven't much hope of that, since Carl and Tina could have taken it along."

Wolfe's eyes went to Carl: "Did you and your wife leave the shop together?"

Carl shook his head. "That might have been noticed, so she went first. When she was gone I waited until they were all busy and Mr. Fickler was walking behind the partition, then I ran upstairs to meet her there."

"When was that?" I asked. "Who was in Tina's booth with Wallen?"

"I don't think anybody was. Janet had come out a while before. She was at Jimmie's chair with a customer."

"Good heavens," I turned my palms up. "You left that place less than a minute, maybe only a few seconds, before Fickler found Wallen dead!"

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"I don't know." Carl wasn't fazed. "I only know I didn't touch that man."

"This," I told Wolfe, "makes it even nicer. There was a slim chance we could get it that they left sooner."

"Yes." He regarded me. "It must be assumed that Wallen was alive when Ed left the booth, since that young woman — what's her name?"

"Janet."

"I call few men, and no women, by their first names. What's her name?"

"Stahl," Tina said. "Janet Stahl."

"Thank you. . . . Wallen was presumably alive when Ed left the booth, since Miss Stahl followed him. So Miss Stahl, who saw Wallen last, and Mr. Fickler, who reported him dead — manifestly they had opportunity. What about the others?"

"You must remember," I told him, "that I had just dropped in for a shave. I had to show the right amount of intellectual curiosity, but I had to be careful not to carry it too far. From what Ed said, I gathered that opportunity is fairly wide open, except he excludes himself. As you know, they all keep darting behind that partition for one thing or another. Ed can't remember who did and who didn't, during that ten or fifteen minutes, and it's a safe bet that the others can't remember, either. The fact that the cops were interested enough to ask shows that Carl and Tina haven't got a complete monopoly on it. As Ed remarked, they've gotta have evidence, and they're still looking."

Wolfe grunted in disgust.

"It also shows," I went on, "that they haven't got any real stopper to cork it, like prints from the car or localizing the scissors or anything they found on the corpse. They sure want Carl and Tina, and you know what happens when they get them, but they're still short on exhibits. If you like your suggestion to keep our guests here until Cramer and Stebbins get their paws on the right guy, it might work fine as a long-term policy, but you're against the idea of women living here, or even a woman, and after a few months it might get on your nerves."

"It is no good," Tina said, back to her gasping whisper again. "Just let us go! I beg you, do that!"

Wolfe ignored her. He leaned back, closed his eyes, and heaved a deep sigh, and from the way his nose began to twitch I knew he was coercing himself into facing the hard fact that he would have to go to work — either that or tell me to call Purley, and that was ruled out of bounds both by his self-respect and his professional vanity.

Wolfe sighed again, opened his eyes, and rasped at Tina, "Except for Mr. Fickler, that man questioned you first. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me what he said. What he asked. I want every word."

I thought Tina did pretty well, under the circumstances. She wrinkled her brow and concentrated, and it looked as if Wolfe got it all out of

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her. But she couldn't give him what she didn't have.

He kept after it: "You are certain he showed you no object whatever?"

"Yes, I'm sure he didn't."

"He asked about no object, anything, in the shop?"

"No."

"He took nothing from his pocket?"

"No."

"The newspaper he had. Didn't he take that from his pocket?"

"No, like I said, he had it in his hand when he came in the booth."

"In his hand or under his arm?"

"In his hand. I think — yes, I'm sure."

"Was it folded up?"

"Well, of course newspapers are folded."

"Yes, Mrs. Vardas. Just remember the newspaper as you saw it in his hand. I'm making a point of it because there is nothing else to make a point of, and we must have a point if we can find one. Was the newspaper folded up as if he had had it in his pocket?"

"No, it wasn't." She was trying hard. "It wasn't folded that much. Like I said, it was a *Daily Press*. When he sat down he put it on the table, at the end by his right hand — yes, that's right, my left hand — I moved some of my things to make room — and it was the way it is on the newsstand, so that's all it was folded."

"But he didn't mention it?"

"No."

"And you noticed nothing unusual about it? I mean the newspaper?"

She shook her head. "It was just a newspaper."

Wolfe repeated the performance with Carl, and got more of the same. No object produced or mentioned, no hint of any. The only one on exhibit, the newspaper, had been there on the end of the table when Carl, sent by Fickler, had entered and sat, and Wallen had made no reference to it. Carl was more practical than Tina. He didn't work as hard as she had trying to remember Wallen's exact words, and I must say I couldn't blame him.

Wolfe gave up trying to get what they didn't have. He leaned back, compressed his lips, closed his eyes, and tapped with his forefingers on the ends of his chair arms. Finally he opened his eyes. "Confound it," he said peevishly, "it's impossible. Even if I had a move to make I couldn't make it. If I so much as stir a finger, Mr. Cramer will start yelping and I have no muzzle for him. Any effort to —"

The doorbell rang. During lunch Fritz had been told to leave it to me, so I arose, crossed to the hall, and went front. But not all the way. Four paces short of the door I saw, through the one-way glass panel, the red, rugged face and the heavy, broad shoulders. I wheeled and returned to the office, not dawdling, and told Wolfe, "The man to fix the chair."

"Indeed." His head jerked up. "The front room."

Carl and Tina, warned by our tone and tempo, were on their feet. The

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bell rang again. I moved, fast, to the door to the front room and pulled it open, telling them, "In here, quick! Step on it!" They obeyed, without a word, as if they had known me and trusted me for years, but what choice did they have? When they had passed through I said, "Relax and keep quiet," shut the door, glanced at Wolfe and got a nod, went to the front door, opened it, and said morosely, "Hello. What now?"

"It took you long enough," Inspector Cramer growled, crossing the threshold.

Wolfe can move when he wants to. I have seen him prove it more than once, as he did then. By the time I was back in the office, following Cramer, he had scattered in front of him on his desk a dozen folders of plant germination records for which he had had to go to the filing cabinet. One of the folders was spread open and he was scowling at us above it. He grunted a greeting but not a welcome. Cramer grunted back, moved to the red leather chair, and sat down.

I got myself at my desk. I was wishing I wasn't involved so I could just enjoy it. If Wolfe succeeded in keeping Cramer's claws off of the Vardas family, and at the same time kept himself out of jail, I would show my appreciation by not hitting him for a raise for a month.

Fritz entered with a tray, so Wolfe had found time to push a button, too. It was the fixed allotment, three bottles of beer. Wolfe told Fritz to bring another glass, but Cramer said no, thanks.

Suddenly Cramer looked at me and demanded, "Where did you go when you left the barbershop?"

My brows went up. "If you really cared you could have put a tail on me. If you didn't care enough to put a tail on me you're just being nosy, and I resent it. Next question."

"Why not answer that one?"

"Because some of the errands I get sent on are confidential, and I don't want to start a bad habit."

Cramer turned abruptly to Wolfe: "You know a police officer was killed this morning there in that shop?"

"Yes." Wolfe halted a foaming glass on its way to his mouth. "Archie told me about it."

"Maybe he did."

"Not maybe. He did."

"Okay." Cramer cocked his head and watched Wolfe empty the glass and use his handkerchief on his lips. Then he said, "Look. This is what brought me here. I have learned over a stretch of years that when I find you within a mile of a murder, and Goodwin is a part of you, something fancy can be expected. I don't need to itemize that — your memory is as good as mine. . . . Wait a second; let me finish.

"I don't say there's no such thing as a coincidence. I know you've been going to that shop for two years, and Goodwin for six years. It wouldn't be so remarkable if he happened in there this particular day, two hours after a murder, if it wasn't for certain fea-

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tures. He told Graboff, his barber, that he needed an emergency shave to go to an appointment. Incidentally, it couldn't have been much of an emergency, since he waited nearly half an hour while Graboff finished with a customer, but I might concede that. The point is that Graboff and Fickler both say that in the six years Goodwin has been going there he has never gone just for a shave. Not once. He goes only for the works: haircut, scalp massage, shampoo, *and* shave. That makes it too remarkable. Just one day in six years an emergency sends him there for a shave. I don't believe it."

Wolfe shrugged. "Then you don't. I'm not responsible for your credulity quotient, Mr. Cramer. Neither is Mr. Goodwin. I don't see how we can help you."

"Nobody would believe it," Cramer said stubbornly, refusing to get riled. "That's why I'm here. I do believe that Goodwin went to that shop because he knew a man had been murdered there."

"Then you believe wrong," I told him. "Until I got there I hadn't the slightest idea or suspicion that a man had been murdered, there or anywhere else."

"You have been known to lie, Goodwin."

"Only within limits, and I know what they are. I will state that in an affidavit. Write it out, and there's a notary at the corner drugstore. That would be perjury, which I'm allergic to."

"Your going there had nothing whatever to do with the murder?"

"Put it that way if you prefer it. It did not."

Wolfe was pouring beer. "How," he inquired, not belligerently, "was Mr. Goodwin supposed to have learned of the murder? Had you fitted that in?"

"I don't know." Cramer gestured impatiently. "I didn't come here with a diagram. I only know what it means when I'm on a homicide, and suddenly there you are, or Goodwin. And there Goodwin was, two hours after it happened. Frankly, I have no idea where you come in. You work only for big money. That hit-and-run driver could be a man with money, but if so it couldn't be someone who works in that shop. No one there has the kind of dough that hires Nero Wolfe. So I don't see how it could be money that pulled you in, and I frankly admit I have no idea what else could. I guess I'll have a little beer, after all, if you don't mind. I'm tired."

Wolfe leaned forward to push the button.

"What was on my mind," Cramer said, "was two things: First, I did not believe that Goodwin just happened to drop in at the scene of a murder. I admit he's not quite brazen enough to commit perjury." He looked at me. "I want that affidavit. Today."

"You'll get it," I assured him.

Fritz entered with another tray, put it down on the little table at Cramer's elbow, and uncapped the bottle. "Shall I pour, sir?"

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"Thanks, I will." Cramer took the glass in his left hand, tilted it, and poured with his right. Unlike Wolfe, he didn't care for a lot of foam. "Second," he said, "I thought that what took Goodwin there might be something you would be ready to tell me about, but he wouldn't because you're the boss and he's a clam unless you say the word. I don't pretend to have anything to pry it out of you with. You know the law about withholding evidence as well as I do; you ought to, the stunts you've pulled —"

"You thought," Wolfe asked, "that I had sent Archie to the shop on business?"

"Yes. For the reason given."

"You're wrong. I didn't. Since you're to get an affidavit from Archie, you might as well have one from me too and get it settled. In it I will say that I did not send him to the barbershop, that I did not know he was going there, and that I heard and knew nothing of the murder until he returned and told me."

"You'll swear to that?"

"As a favor to you, yes. You've wasted your time coming here, and you might as well get a little something out of it." Wolfe reached for his second bottle. "By the way, I still don't know why you came. According to Archie, the murderer is known and all you have to do is find him — that man at the clothes rack — uh, Carl. And his wife, you said, Archie?"

"Yes, sir. Tina, one of the manicurists. Purley told me straight they had done it and scooted."

Wolfe frowned at Cramer. "Then what could you expect to get from me? How could I help?"

"What I said, that's all," Cramer insisted doggedly, pouring the rest of his beer. "When I see Goodwin poking around I want to know why."

"I don't believe it," Wolfe said rudely. He turned to me: "Archie, I think you're responsible for this. I think it was something you did or said. What was it?"

"Sure; it's always me," I was hurt. "What I did, I got a shave, and Ed had a customer and I had to wait, so I talked with Purley and with Inspector Cramer and then with Janet — Miss Stahl to you — and with Ed while I was in the chair — that is, he talked —"

"What did you say to Mr. Cramer?"

"Practically nothing. Just answered a civil question."

"What did you say to Mr. Stebbins?"

I thought I knew now where he was headed, and hoped I was right. "Oh, just asked what was going on, and he told me. I've told you about it."

"Not verbatim. What did you say?"

"Nothing at all. Of course, Purley wanted to know what brought me there, and I told him I — Say, wait a minute! Maybe you're right, at that! He asked me if I had seen Carl or Tina this morning, and I said sure, I had put them here in the front room and told them to wait, and if he would step on —".

"Ha!" Wolfe snorted. "I knew it!

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Your confounded tongue. So that's it." He looked at Cramer. "Why have you waited to pounce?" he asked, trying not to sound too contemptuous, for, after all, Cramer was drinking his beer. "Since Archie has rashly disclosed our little secret, it would be useless for me to try to keep it. That's what we use the front room for mainly — to keep murderers in. You're armed, I suppose? Go in and get them. Archie, open the door for him."

I went to the door to the front room and pulled it open, not too wide.

"I'm scared of murderers, myself," I said courteously, "or I'd be glad to help."

Cramer had a glass half-full of beer in his hand, and it may well be that that took the trick. Bullheaded as he was, he might have been capable of getting up and walking over for a look into the room, even though our build-up had convinced him it was empty. But the glass of beer complicated it. He would either have to take it with him or reach first to put it down on the little table — or throw it at Wolfe.

"Nuts," he said, and lifted the glass to drink.

I swung the door to, carelessly, without bothering to see that it latched, and yawned on the way back to my chair.

"At least," Wolfe said, rubbing it in, "I can't be jailed for harboring a fugitive — one of your favorite threats. But I really don't know what you're after. If it was those two, you'll get them, of course. What else is there?"

"Nothing but a little more evidence." Cramer glanced at his wristwatch. "We'll get 'em, all right. It don't pay to kill a cop in this town." He stood up. "It wouldn't pay for anyone to hide a cop killer in their front room, either. Thanks for the beer. I'll be expecting those affidavits, and in case —"

The phone rang. I swiveled and got it. "Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking."

"Inspector Cramer there?"

I said, yes, hold it. "For you," I told him, and moved aside. He spoke not more than twenty words altogether, between spells of listening. He dropped the phone onto the cradle and headed for the door.

"Have they found 'em?" I asked his back.

"No." He didn't turn. "Someone's hurt — the Stahl girl."

I marched after him, thinking the least I could do was cooperate by opening another door for him, but he was there and on out before I caught up, so I about-faced and returned to the office.

Wolfe was standing up, and I wondered why all the exertion, but a glance at the wall clock showed me 3:55, nearly time for his afternoon visit to the plant-rooms.

"He said Janet got hurt," I stated.

Wolfe, finishing his beer, grunted.

"I owe Janet something. Besides, it could mean that Carl and Tina are

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out of it. I can be there in ten minutes. Why not?"

"No." He looked at the clock, and moved. "Put those folders back, please." Halfway to the door, he turned. "Disturb me only if it is unavoidable. And admit no more displaced persons to the house. Two at a time is enough."

I put the folders away and then went to the front room. Tina, who was lying on the couch, sat up as I entered and saw to her skirt hem. She had nice legs, but my mind was occupied. Carl, on a chair near the foot of the couch, stood up and asked a string of questions with his eyes.

"As you were," I told them gruffly. I heartily agreed with Wolfe that two was enough. "I hope you didn't go near the windows."

"We have learned so long ago to stay away from windows," Carl said. "But we want to go. We will pay the fifty dollars gladly."

"You can't go." I was emphatic. "That was Inspector Cramer, a very important policeman. We told him you were in here, and so —"

"You told him —" Tina gasped.

"Yes. It's the Hitler-Stalin technique in reverse. They tell barefaced lies to have them taken for the truth, and we told the barefaced truth to have it taken for a lie. It worked. So now we're stuck, and you are, too. You stay here. We've told the cops you're in this room, and you're not going to leave it, at least not until bedtime. I'm locking you in." I pointed to a door. "That's a bathroom, and there's a glass if you want a drink. It has another door into the office, but I'll lock it. The windows have bars."

I crossed to the door to the hall and locked it with my master key. I went through to the office, entered the bathroom in the corner, turned the bolt flange on the door to the front room, opened the door an inch, returned to the office, locked that door with my key, and went back to the front room.

"All set," I told them. "Make yourselves comfortable. If you need anything don't yell, this room is soundproofed; push this button." I put my finger on it, under the edge of the table. "I'll give you the news as soon as there is any." I was going.

"But this is hanging in the air on a thread," Carl protested.

"You're right, it is," I agreed grimly. "Your only hope is that Mr. Wolfe has now put his foot in it and it's up to him to get both you and him loose, not to mention me. By the way, there is a small gleam. Inspector Cramer beat it back to the shop because he got a phone call that Janet had been hurt. If she got hurt with scissors with you not there, it may be a real break."

"Janet?" Tina was distressed. "Was she hurt much?"

"I don't know," I said, "and I'm not going to try to find out. We'll have to sit it out, at least until six o'clock." I glanced at my wrist. "That's only an hour and twenty minutes. Then we'll see if Mr. Wolfe

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has cooked up a charade. If not, he may at least invite you to dinner. See you later."

I went to the door to the office, passed through, closed the door, and locked it. There in privacy I took a survey of the Vardas situation. Being smart enough to get it in that neither Carl nor Tina could drive a car was all right as far as it went, but it proved nothing at all about the scissors in Jake Wallen's back; it merely showed that there are motives and motives. The cops thought Wallen had been killed by a cornered hit-and-run driver, but what did I think? And, even more important, what did Wolfe think? I was still trying to find the answers when the phone rang.

It was Sergeant Purley Stebbins: "Archie? . . . Purley. I'm at the barbershop. We want you here quick."

I responded courteously: "I'm busy, but I guess so. If you really want me. Do you care to specify?"

"When you get here. Grab a cab."

I buzzed Wolfe on the house phone and reported the development. Then I hopped. . . .

The crowd of spectators ganged up in the corridor outside the Goldenrod Barbershop was twice as big as it had been before, and inside the shop there was a fine assortment of cops and dicks to look at. The corridor sported not one flatfoot, but three, keeping people away from the entrance. I told one of them my name and errand and was ordered to wait, and in a minute Purley came and escorted me in.

I darted a glance around. The barber chairs were all empty. Fickler and three of the barbers, Jimmie, Ed, and Philip, were seated along the row of waiting chairs, in their white jackets, each with a dick beside him. Tom was not in view.

Purley had guided me to the corner by the cash register. "How long have you known that Janet Stahl?" he demanded.

I shook my head reproachfully. "Not that way. You said I was needed and I came on the run. If you merely want my biography, call at the office any time during hours."

Purley's right shoulder twitched. It was only a reflex of his impulse to sock me, beyond his control and therefore nothing to resent. "Some day," he said, setting his jaw and then releasing it. "She was found on the floor of her booth, out from a blow on her head. We brought her to and she can talk, but she won't. She won't tell us anything. She says she won't talk to anybody except her friend Archie Goodwin. How long have you known her?"

"I'm touched," I said with emotion. "The only chat I've ever had with her was here today under your eye, but look what it did to her. Is it any wonder my opinion of myself is what it is?"

"Listen, Goodwin; we're after a murderer."

"I know you are. I'm all for it."

"You've never seen her outside this shop?"

"No."

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"That can be checked, maybe. Right now we want you to get her to talk. She's stopped us dead. Come on." He moved.

I caught his elbow. "Hold it. If she sticks to it that she'll only talk with me I'll have to think up questions. I ought to know what happened."

"Yeah." Purley wanted no more delay, but obviously I had a point. "There were only three of us left — me here at the front, and Joffe and Sullivan there on chairs. The barbers were all working on customers. Fickler was moving around. I was on the phone half the time."

"Where was Janet?"

"I'm telling you. Toracco — that's Philip — finished with a customer, and a new one got in his chair — we were letting regular customers in. The new one wanted a manicure, and Toracco called Janet, but she didn't come. Fickler was helping the outgoing customer on with his coat. Toracco went behind the partition to get Janet, and there she was on the floor of her booth, cold. She had gone there fifteen minutes before, possibly twenty. I think all of them had gone behind the partition at least once during that time."

"How bad is she hurt?"

"Not enough for the hospital. Doc let us keep her here. She was hit above the right ear with a bottle taken from the supply shelf against the partition, six feet from the entrance to her booth. The bottle was big and heavy, full of oil. It was there by her on the floor."

"Prints?"

"For Pete's sake, start a school. He had a towel in his hand or something. Come on."

"One second. What did the doctor say when you asked him if she could have been just testing her skull?"

"He said it was possible, but he doubted it. Come and ask her."

I had never been behind the partition before. The space ran about half the length of the shop. Against the partition were steamers, vats, lamps, and other paraphernalia, and then a series of cupboards and shelves. Across a wide aisle were the manicure booths, four of them, though I had never seen more than two operators in the shop. As we passed the entrance to the first booth in the line, a glance showed me Inspector Cramer seated at a little table across from Tom, the barber with white hair. Cramer saw me and arose. I followed Purley to the third booth, and on in. Then steps behind me and Cramer was there.

It was a big booth, eight by eight, but was now crowded. In addition to us three and the furniture, a city employee was standing in a corner, and, on a row of chairs lined up against the right wall, Janet Stahl was lying on her back, her head resting on a stack of towels. She had moved her eyes, but not her head, to take in us visitors. She looked beautiful.

"Here's your friend Goodwin," Purley told her, trying to sound sympathetic.

"Hello, there," I said professionally. "What does this mean?"

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The long, home-grown lashes fluttered at me. "You," she said.

"Yep. Your friend Archie Goodwin." There was a chair there, the only one she wasn't using, and I squeezed past Purley and sat, facing her. "How do you feel — terrible?"

"No, I don't feel at all. I am past feeling."

I reached for her wrist, got my fingers on the spot, and looked at my watch. In thirty seconds I said, "Your pump isn't bad. May I inspect your head?"

"If you're careful."

"Groan if it hurts." I used all fingers to part the fine brown hair, and gently but thoroughly investigated the scalp. She closed her eyes and flinched once, but there was no groan. "A lump to write home about," I announced. "Who did it?"

"Send them away and I'll tell you." I turned to the kibitzers. "Get out," I said sternly. "If I had been here this would never have happened."

They went without a word. I sat listening to the sound of their retreating footsteps outside in the aisle, then thought I had better provide sound to cover in case they were careless tiptoeing back. They had their choice of posts, just outside the open entrance or in the adjoining booths. The partitions were only six feet high. "It was dastardly," I said. "He might have killed you. You're lucky you've got a good, strong, thick skull."

"I started to scream," she said, "but it was too late."

"What started you to scream? Seeing him, or hearing him?"

"It was both. I was in the customers' chair, with my back to the door — and there was a little noise behind me, like a stealthy step, and I looked up and saw him reflected in the partition glass, right behind me, with his arm raised, and I started to scream, but before I could get it out he struck —"

"Wait a minute." I got up and moved my chair to the outer side of the little table and sat in it. "These details are important. You were like this?"

"That's it. I was sitting thinking."

I felt that the opinion I had formed of her previously had not done her justice. The crinkly glass of the partition wall behind her could reflect no object whatever, no matter how the light was. Her contempt for mental processes was absolutely spectacular. I asked, "Did you recognize him?"

"Of course I did. That's why I wouldn't speak to them. That's why I had to see you. It was that big one with the big ears and gold tooth, the one they call Stebbins, or they call him sergeant."

I wasn't surprised. I knew the power of her imagination now. "You mean it was him that hit you with the bottle?"

"I can't say it was him that hit me. I think people should be careful what they accuse other people of. I only know it was him I saw standing behind me with his arm raised, and then something hit me. From that

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anyone can only draw conclusions, but there are other reasons, too. He was rude to me this morning, asking me questions, and all day he has been looking at me in a rude way, not the way a girl is willing for a man to look at her. And then you can just be logical. Would Ed want to kill me, or Philip or Jimmie or Tom or Mr. Fickler? Why would they? So it must have been him, even if I hadn't seen him."

"It does sound logical," I conceded. "But I've known Stebbins for years and have never known him to strike a woman without cause. What did he have against you?"

"I don't know." She frowned a little. "That's one of the first things you must tell me, how to answer things to the reporters. That's how you'll earn your ten per cent."

"My ten per cent of what?"

"Of everything I get. As my manager." She extended a hand. "Shake on it."

To avoid a contractual shake without offending, I grasped the back of her hand with my left, turning her palm up, and ran the fingers of my right from her wrist to her fingertips. "It's a darned good idea," I said appreciatively, "but we'll have to postpone it. I'm going through bankruptcy just now and it would be illegal for me to make a contract. Later on —"

"I don't need you later on. I need you right now."

"Here I am, you've got me, but not under contract yet." I got emphatic: "If you tell reporters I'm your manager, I'll give you a lump that will make that one seem as flat as a pool table. If they ask why he hit you, don't say you don't know; say it's a mystery. Now —"

"That's it!" She was delighted.

"Sure. Tell 'em that. Now we've got to consider the cops. Stebbins is a cop, and they won't want it hung on him. They've had one cop killed here today already. They'll try to tie this up with that. They'll try to make it that somebody here killed Wallen, and he found out that you knew something about it, so he tried to kill you. They may even think they have some kind of evidence — for instance, something you were heard to say. So we have to be prepared. We have to go back over it. Are you listening?"

"Certainly. What do I say when the reporters ask me if I'm going to go on working here? Couldn't I say I don't want to desert Mr. Fickler in a time of trouble?"

It took control to stay in that chair. But at home there were the guests locked in the front room, and some time, somehow, we had to get rid of them.

"That's the ticket," I said warmly. "Say you've got to be loyal to Mr. Fickler. Have you ever been interviewed before?"

"No, this will be the first, and I want to start right."

"Good for you. What they like best of all is to get the jump on the police. If you can tell them something

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the cops don't know they'll love you forever. For instance, the fact that Stebbins crowned you doesn't prove that he's the only one involved. He must have an accomplice here in the shop, or why did Wallen come here, in the first place? We'll call the accomplice X. Now listen:

"Some time today, some time or other after Wallen's body was found, you saw something or heard something, and X knew you did. He knew it, and he knew that if you told about it — if you told me, for example — it would put him and Stebbins on the spot. Naturally, both of them would want to kill you. It could have been X that tried to, but since you say you saw Stebbins reflected in the glass, we'll let it go at that for now. Here's the point:

"If you can remember what it was you saw or heard that scared X, and if you tell the reporters before the cops get wise to it, they'll be your friends for life. Concentrate. Remember everything you saw and heard here today, and everything you did and said, too."

She was frowning. "I don't remember anything that would scare anybody."

"Not right off the bat, who could?" Her hand was right there and I patted it. "I guess we'd better go over it together, right straight through. That's the way Nero Wolfe would do it. What time did you get to work this morning?"

"When I always do — a quarter to nine. I'm punctual."

"Were the others already here?"

"Some were and some weren't."

"Who was and who wasn't?"

"My heavens, I don't know. I didn't notice." She was resentful. "When I came to work I was thinking of something else, so how would I notice?"

I had to be patient. "Okay, we'll start at another point. You remember when Wallen came in and spoke with Fickler, and went to Tina's booth and talked with her, and when Tina came out Fickler sent Philip in to him. You remember that?"

She nodded. "I guess so."

"Guesses won't get us anywhere. Just recall the situation. There's Philip, coming around the end of the partition after talking with Wallen. Did you hear him say anything? Did you say anything to him?"

"I don't think Philip was this X," she declared. "He is married, with children. I think it was Jimmie Kirk. He tried to make passes at me when I first came, and he drinks — you can ask Ed about that — and he thinks he's superior. A barber being superior!" She looked pleased. "That's a good idea about Jimmie being X, because I don't have to say he really tried to kill me. I'll try to remember something he said. Would it matter exactly when he said it?"

I had had enough, but a man can't hit a woman when she's down, so I ended it without violence.

"Not at all," I told her, "but I've got an idea. I'll go and see if I can get something out of Jimmie. Meanwhile,

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I'll send a reporter in to break the ice with you, from the *Gazette* probably." I was on my feet. "Just use your common sense and stick to facts. See you later."

"But Mr. Goodwin! I want —"

I was gone. I strode down the aisle and around the end of the partition. There I halted, and it wasn't long before I was joined by Cramer and Purley. Their faces were expressive. I didn't have to ask if they had got it all.

"If you shoot her," I suggested, "send her brain to Johns Hopkins, if you can find it."

Cramer grunted. "Did she do it herself?"

"I doubt it. It was a pretty solid blow to raise that lump, and you didn't find her prints on the bottle. Bothering about prints is beneath her. I had to come up for air, but I left you an in. Better pick a strong character to play the role of reporter from the *Gazette*."

"Send for Biatti," Cramer snapped at Purley.

"Yeah," I agreed, "he can take it. Now I go home?"

"No. She might insist on seeing her manager again."

"I wouldn't pass that around," I warned them. "How would you like a broadcast of her line on Sergeant Stebbins? I'd like to be home for dinner. We're having fresh pork tenderloin."

"We would all like to be home for dinner." Cramer's look and tone were both sour. They didn't change when he shifted to Purley: "Is the Vardas pair still all you want?"

"They're what I want most," Purley said doggedly. "In spite of her getting it when they weren't here, but I guess we've got to spread out more. You can finish with them here and go home to dinner, and I suppose we've got to take 'em all downtown. I still want to be shown that the Stahl girl couldn't have used that bottle on herself, and I don't have to be shown that she could have used the scissors on Wallen if she felt like it. Or if she performed with the bottle to have something to tell reporters about, the Vardases are still what I want most. But I admit the other 'if' is the biggest one. If someone here conked her, finding out who and why comes first until we get the Vardases."

Cramer stayed sour: "You haven't even started."

"Maybe that's a little too strong, Inspector. We were on the Vardases, but we didn't clear out of here; we kept close. Then, when we found the Stahl girl and brought her to, she shut the valve and had to see Goodwin. Even so, I wouldn't say we haven't made a start with the others. Ed Graboff plays the horses and owes a bookie nine hundred dollars, and he had to sell his car. Philip Toracco went off the rails in 1945 and spent a year in a booby hatch. Joel Fickler has been seen in public places with Horny Gallagher, and while that don't prove —"

Cramer cut in to shoot at me, "Is Fickler a racket boy?"

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I shook my head. "Sorry. Blank. I've never been anything but a customer."

"If he is we'll get it." Purley was riled and didn't care who knew it. "Jimmie Kirk apparently only goes back three years, and he has expensive habits for a barber. Tom Yerkes did a turn in 1939 for assault — beat up a guy who took his young daughter for a fast weekend — and he is known for having a quick takeoff. So I don't think you can say we haven't even started."

"Are all alibis for last night being checked?" Cramer demanded.

"They have been."

"Do them over, and good. Get it going. Use as many men as you need. And not only alibis — records, too. I want the Vardas pair as much as you do, but if the Stahl girl didn't use that bottle on herself, I also want someone else. Get Biatti here. Let him have a try at her before you take her down."

"Yes, sir."

Purley moved. He went to the phone at the cashier's counter. I went to the one in the booth at the end of the clothes rack and dialed the number I knew best. Fritz answered, and I asked him to buzz the extension in the plant-rooms, since it was still a few minutes short of six o'clock.

"Where are you?" Wolfe demanded. He was always testy when interrupted.

"At the barbershop." I was none too genial, myself. "Janet was sitting in her booth and got hit on the head with a bottle of oil. They have gone through the routine and are still at the starting line. Her condition is no more critical than it was before she got hit. As I told you, she insisted on seeing me, and I have had a long, intimate talk with her. I can't say I made no progress, because she asked me to be her manager, and I am now giving you notice, quitting at the end of this week. Aside from that I got nowhere. I advise you to tell Fritz to increase the grocery orders until further notice."

Silence. Then, "Who is there?"

"Everybody. Cramer, Purley, squad men, the staff. The whole party will be moved downtown in an hour or so."

"Pfui." Silence. In a moment: "Stay there." The connection went.

I left the booth. Neither Purley nor Cramer was in sight. I moseyed toward the rear, with the line of empty barber chairs on my left and the row of waiting chairs against the partition on my right. Fickler was there, and three of the barbers — Ed being the missing one now — with dicks in between.

The chair on the left of the magazine table was empty, and I dropped into it. Apparently, no one had felt like reading today, since the same copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* was still on top. After sitting a few minutes I became aware that I was trying to analyze Janet. There must be some practical method of digging up from her memory the fact or facts that we had to have. Hypnotize her, maybe? That might work. I was

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considering suggesting it to Cramer when I became aware of movement over at the door and lifted my eyes.

A flatfoot was blocking the entrance to keep a man fully twice his weight from entering, and was explaining the situation. The man let him finish and then spoke:

"I know, I know." His eyes came at me over the flatfoot's shoulder, and he bellowed, "Archie! Where's Mr. Cramer?"

I got up and made for the door in no haste or jubilation.

"Okay, take it easy. I'll go see —"

But I didn't have to go. His bellow had carried within, and Cramer's voice came from right behind me:

"Well! Dynamite?"

The flatfoot had moved aside, leaving it to the brass, and Wolfe had crossed the sill. "I came to get a haircut," he stated, and marched past the sergeant and inspector to the rack, took off his hat, coat, vest, and tie, hung them up, crossed to Jimmie's chair, the second in the line, and got his bulk up onto the seat. In the mirrored wall fronting him he had a panorama of the row of barbers and dicks in his rear, and without turning his head he called, "Jimmie! If you please?"

Jimmie's dancing dark eyes came to Cramer and Purley, there by me. So did others. Cramer stood scowling at Wolfe. We all held our poses while Cramer slowly lifted his right hand and carefully and thoroughly scratched the side of his nose with his forefinger. That attended to, he decided to sit down. He went to the first chair in the line, turned it to face Wolfe.

"You want a haircut, huh?"

"Yes, sir. I need one."

"Yeah." Cramer turned his head. "All right, Kirk. Come and cut his hair."

Jimmie got up and went past the chair to the cabinet for an apron. Everybody stirred, as if a climax had been reached and passed. Purley strode to the third chair in the line, Philip's, and got on it. That way he and Cramer had Wolfe surrounded, and it seemed only fair for me to be handy, so I detoured around Cramer, pulled Jimmie's stool to one side, and perched on it.

Jimmie had Wolfe aproned and his scissors were singing above the right ear. Wolfe barred clippers.

"You just dropped in," Cramer rasped. "Like Goodwin this morning."

"Certainly not." Wolfe was curt but not pugnacious. "You summoned Mr. Goodwin. He told me on the phone of his fruitless talk with Miss Stahl, and I thought it well to come."

Cramer grunted. "Okay, you're here. And you're not going to leave until I know why, without any funny business about murderers in your front room."

"Not as short behind as last time," Wolfe commanded.

"Yes, sir." Jimmie had never had as big or attentive an audience, and he was giving a good show.

"Naturally," Wolfe said tolerantly, "I expected that. You can badger me,

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if that's what you're after, and get nowhere, but I offer a suggestion. Why not work first? Why don't we see if we can settle this business? Or would you rather harass me than catch a murderer?"

"I'm working now. I want the murderer. What about you?"

"Forget me for the moment. You can hound me any time. I would like to propose certain assumptions about what happened here today. Do you care to hear them?"

"I'll listen, but don't drag it out."

"I won't. Please don't waste time challenging the assumptions; I don't intend to defend them, much less validate them. They are merely a basis of exploration, to be tested. The first is this — that Wallen found something in the car, the car that had killed the woman. . . . No, I don't like it this way. I want a direct view, not reflections. Jimmie, turn me around, please."

Jimmie whirled the chair a half-turn, so that Wolfe's back was to the mirrored wall, also to me, and he was facing those seated in the chairs against the partition.

I spoke up: "Ed isn't here."

"I left him in the booth," Purley rumbled.

"Get him," Wolfe instructed. "And Miss Stahl, where is she?"

"In her booth lying down."

"Archie. Bring Miss Stahl."

He had a nerve picking on me, with an inspector and a sergeant and three dicks there, but I postponed telling him so and went, as Purley went for Ed. In the booth Janet was still on her back on the chairs, her eyes wide open. At sight of me she fired immediately: "You said you were going to send a reporter —"

I raised my voice to stop her: "Listen to me, girlie. You're getting a break. Nero Wolfe is here with a suggestion and wants your opinion of it. Can you sit up?"

"Certainly I can, but —"

"Take it easy." I put an arm behind her shoulders. "Are you dizzy?"

"I'm never dizzy," she said scornfully, and shook me off and went on solo. She wasn't taking help from a man, and of course I wasn't her manager yet. She took the chair I had vacated when Wolfe appeared, next to the magazine table. Ed had been brought by Purley, who was back in Philip's chair, flanking Wolfe. I returned to the stool.

Jimmie had finished above the ears and was doing the back, so Wolfe's head was tilted forward.

"Your assumptions?" Cramer asked.

"Yes. I was saying, the first is that Wallen found something in the car that led him to this shop. It couldn't have been something he was told, for there was no one to tell him anything. It was some object. I asked you not to challenge me, but I didn't mean to exclude contradictions. If there are facts that repudiate this assumption, or any other, I want them."

"We made that one without any help."

"And it still holds?"

"Yes."

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"Good. That's fortunate, since all of my assumptions concern that object. The second is that Wallen had it with him when he came here. I can support that with sound —"

"You don't need to. We made it and we hold it."

"Very well. That saves time. . . . Not too short back there, Jimmie."

"No, sir."

"The third is that he had the object inside the newspaper he was carrying. This is slenderer, but it must be tested. He had not bought the paper shortly before coming here, for it was an early edition of the *Daily Press*, on sale last evening, not on sale this morning. It was not merely stuffed in his pocket, he had it in his hand; not rolled up, but folded over once. It is —"

"You know a lot about it," Cramer growled.

"Do me later," Wolfe snapped. "I know nothing you don't know. It is difficult to account for him carrying a stale newspaper in that manner except on the assumption that it was *a container for some object* — at least, the assumption is good enough to work on. The fourth is that whatever the object was, the murderer got it and disposed of it. More than an assumption, that is. No object that could have led him to this shop was found on Wallen's person or in the booth, so if he had it the murderer got it. The fifth assumption is that the murderer was neither Carl nor Tina. I shall —"

"Ah," Cramer said. "Tell us why."

"No. I shall not support that assumption; I merely make it and submit it to our test. Don't waste time clawing at me. Since Carl and Tina are not involved, and therefore didn't take the object away with them, it is still here in the shop. That is the sixth assumption, and it is good only if your surveillance of these people here, all these hours, has been constant and alert. What about it? Could any of them have removed such an object?"

"I want to know," Cramer demanded, "why you're excluding Carl and Tina."

"No. Not now." Wolfe and Cramer couldn't see each other because Jimmie was in between, starting on the top. "First we'll complete this test. We must know whether the object has been removed, *not* by Carl or Tina."

"No," Purley said.

"How good a no?"

"Good enough for me. No man has stepped outside this shop alone. Something could have been slipped to a customer, but that's stretching it, and we've had them under our eyes."

"Not, apparently, the one who assaulted Miss Stahl."

"That was in the shop. Is that a point?"

"I suppose not. Then we assume that the object is still here. The seventh and last assumption is this: that no proper search for such an object has been made. I hasten to add, Mr. Stebbins, that that is not a point, either. You and your men

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are unquestionably capable of making a proper search, but I assume that you haven't done so on account of Carl and Tina. Thinking them guilty, naturally you thought they wouldn't leave an incriminating object behind. Have you searched thoroughly?"

"We've looked."

"Yes. But granting all my assumptions, which of course you don't, has there been a proper search?"

"No."

"Then it's about time. Mr. Fickler!"

Fickler jerked his head up. "Me?"

"You run this place and can help us. However, I address all of you who work here. Put your minds on this. You too, Jimmie."

Jimmie backed off a step and stood.

"This," Wolfe said, "could take a few minutes or it could take all night. What we're after is an object with something on it that identifies it as coming from this shop. Ideally, it should be the name and address or phone number, but we'll take less if we have to. Since we're proceeding on my assumptions, we are supposing that it was inside the newspaper as Wallen was carrying it, so it is not a business card or match folder or bottle or comb or brush. It should be flat and of considerable dimensions. Another point: It should be easily recognizable. All of you went to the booth and were questioned by Wallen, but he showed you no such object and mentioned none. Is that correct?"

They nodded and mumbled affirmatives. Ed said, "Yes!"

"Then only the murderer saw it or was told of it. Wallen must for some reason have shown it to him, or asked him about it, and not the rest of you; or its edge may have been protruding from the newspaper, unnoticed by the others; or the murderer may merely have suspected that Wallen had it. In any case, when opportunity offered later for him to dive into the booth and kill Wallen, he got the object. If Mr. Stebbins is right about the surveillance that has been maintained, it is still here in the shop. I put it to you, and especially to you, Mr. Fickler: What and where is it?"

They looked at one another and back at Wolfe. Philip said in his thin tenor, "Maybe it was the newspaper."

"Possibly. I doubt it. . . . Where is the newspaper, Mr. Cramer?"

"At the laboratory. There's nothing on it or in it that could have brought Wallen here."

"What else has been taken from here to the laboratory?"

"Nothing but the scissors and the bottle that was used on Miss Stahl."

"Then it's here. . . . All right, Jimmie, finish."

"It looks to me," Purley objected in his bass rumble, "like a turkey. Even with your assumptions. Say we find something like what you want, how do we know it's it? Even if we think it's it, where does that get us?"

Wolfe was curt: "For one thing, fingerprints."

"Nuts. If it belongs here, of course it will have their prints."

"Not *their* prints, Mr. Stebbins. *Wallen's prints!* If he picked it up in

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the car, he touched it. If he touched it, he left prints. As I understand it, he didn't go around touching things here. He entered, spoke to Mr. Fickler, was taken to the booth, and never left it alive. If we find anything with his prints on it, we've got it. Have you equipment here? If not, I advise you to send for it at once, and also for Wallen's prints."

Purley grunted. He didn't move.

"Go ahead," Cramer told him. "Phone. Give him what he wants."

"The search," Wolfe said, "must be thorough and will take time. First I ask all of you to search your minds. What object is here, belongs here, that meets the specifications as I have described them, Mr. Fickler?"

Fickler shook his head. "I don't know, unless it's a towel, and why would he carry a towel like that?"

"He wouldn't. Anyway, a towel wouldn't help us any. . . . Philip?"

"No, sir. I don't know what."

"Tom?"

Tom just shook his head, gloomily.

"Ed?"

"You've got me: Pass."

"Miss Stahl?"

"I think he might have been keeping the paper because there was something in it he wanted to read. I don't have time —"

"Yes. We'll consider that. . . . Jimmie?"

"I don't know a thing like that in the shop, Mr. Wolfe. Not a thing."

"Pfui," Wolfe was disgusted. "Either you have no brains at all, or you're all in a conspiracy. I'm looking straight at such an object right now."

From behind I couldn't see where his gaze was directed, but I didn't have to. The others could, and I saw them. Eleven pairs of eyes, including Purley's, who had finished at the phone and rejoined us, were aimed at the magazine table next to Janet's chair, from eleven different angles. Up to that moment my brain may have been as paralyzed as the others', but it could still react to a stimulus. I left the stool and stood right behind Wolfe, ready if and when needed.

"You mean the magazines?" Cramer demanded.

"Yes. You subscribe to them, Mr. Fickler? They come through the mail? Then the name and address is on them. For instance, that copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* — the name and address of Mr. Fickler, or of The Goldenrod Barbershop, is stenciled on the mailing-wrapper which is still around the magazine. Surely it deserves examination.

"What if he took it from here and had it in his pocket when he stole the car and drove up Broadway? And in the excitement of his misadventure he failed to notice that it had dropped from his pocket and was on the seat of the car? And Wallen found it there, took it, and saw the name and address on it? . . . You have sent for the equipment and Wallen's prints, Mr. Stebbins? Then we —"

"Oh! I remember!" Janet cried. She was pointing a finger. "You remember, Jimmie? This morning, I was standing here, and you came by

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with a hot towel, and you had that magazine — the one sticking out of the mailing-wrapper — and you tossed it under there. That's why you must have been the one to hit me, because I asked if you had been steaming it, and you said —"

Jimmie leaped. I thought his prey was Janet, and in spite of everything I was willing to save her life, but Wolfe and the chair were in my way and cost me a fifth of a second. And it wasn't Janet he was after; it was the magazine — the copy of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. He went for it in a hurtling dive, and got his hands on it, but then the three dicks, not to mention Cramer and Purley, were on his neck.

Janet didn't make a sound. I suppose she was considering what to say to the reporters.

"Confound it," Wolfe grumbled savagely behind me. "*My* barber."

Anyhow, that haircut was done.

As stubborn as Cramer was, he never did learn why Wolfe went to get a haircut that day.

He learned plenty about Jimmie Kirk. Kirk was wanted as a bail jumper, under another name, in Wheeling, West Virginia, on an old charge as a car stealer, with various fancy complications such as slugging a respected citizen who had surprised him in the act. Apparently, he had gone straight in New York for a couple of years and then had hooked up with a car-stealing ring. Unquestionably, he had been fortified with liquids that Monday evening. Driving a stolen car while drunk is a risky operation, especially with a stolen magazine in your pocket. . . .

As for Carl and Tina, I took a strong position on them Tuesday evening in the office.

"You know very well what will happen," I told Wolfe. "Some day, maybe next week, maybe next year, they'll be confronted and they'll be in trouble. Being in trouble, they will come to me, because Carl likes me and because I rescued them —"

Wolfe snorted. "*You* did!"

"Yes, sir. I had already noticed that magazine there several times, and it just happened to catch your eye. Anyhow, I am secretly infatuated with Tina, so I'll try to help them and will get my finger caught, and you'll have to butt in again because you can't get along without me. It will go on like that year after year. Why not try to do something about it now? There are people in Washington you know — for instance, Carpenter. He might be able to help Tina and Carl. It will cost a measly buck for a phone call, and I can get that from the fifty they have earmarked for us. I have Carpenter's home number, and I might as well get him now."

No comment.

I put my hand on the phone. "Person to person, huh?"

Wolfe grunted. "I got my naturalization papers twenty-four years ago."

"I wasn't discussing you. You've caught it from Janet," I said coldly, and then lifted the phone and dialed.

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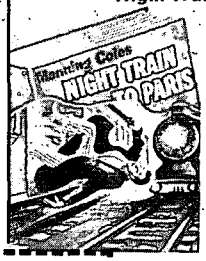

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